VOICES IN THE AIR
- the 2021 posts

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VOICES IN THE AIR

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.
JM Keynes 1936

The table below identifies some of the central issues which have rocked public debate in the West in each of the decades since the 1930s - something I first doodled 20 years ago (with updates from time to time). At the time I didn't quite understand why I was doing it – I now realise that its purpose is to help remind us of the importance of historical perspective..We think, for example, that populism is something new - but talk of "populism" surfaces whenever things seem to be slipping from the control of "ruling elites". Such talk has occurred every 30 years or so in the past 150 years – the 1880s in the US and Russia; the 1930s in Europe and Latin America; the late 1960s globally; the late 1990s in Europe. It's just that we lack the sense of history to appreciate this....

Decade	Themes of intellectual discussion	Key authors
1930s	End of capitalism Fascism	John Strachey, Harold Laski Sorel, Gramsci
1940s	The managerial revolution Keynesianism Realism in politics	J Burnham JM Keynes R Niebuhr, EH Carr
1950s	Totalitarianism Brainwashing Meritocracy Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour	H Arendt; Z Barbu. Talmon V Packard Michael Young A. Shonfield; Tony Crosland JK Galbraith
1960s	End of ideology Corporate planning, management Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	Daniel Bell R Ackoff, Peter Drucker Peter Berger C Pateman; Ivan Illich
1970s	Costs of economic growth, ecology Public choice theory Small is beautiful Change Corporatism Feminism	EJ Mishan, James Lovelock, Club of Rome J Buchanan E. Schumacher; L. Kohr A. Toffler; D. Schon Ackoff Betty Friedan
1980s	Deindustrialisation Privatisation decentralisation globalisation racial equality	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank OECD J Stiglitz, Martin Wolf B Parrekh

1990s	End of history	F Fukayama
	Flexibility and reengineering	M Hammer
	Reinvention of government; NPM	D Osborne, OECD
	Global warming	Scientific community
	The learning organisation	P Senge
	Washington consensus	World Bank
2000s	Good governance	World bank; OECD
	Neo-liberalism	David Harvey
	Environmental collapse	Scientific community
	Migration and social integration	C Cauldwell
	Populism	C Mudde
2010s	Migration	Everyone
	Climate change	N Klein et al
	capitalism	J Stiglitz, J Mander, P Mason, P Collier
	austerity	M Blyth
	Inequality	D Dorling. Wilkinson, T Pikety
	Populism	Mueller, Schneider
Present	Migration	Everyone
	Populism	Everyone – for recent book see Kaufmann
	extinction	C Ingram
	AI, robots, future of work	ILO, Baldwin
	Surveillance, big data	S Zuboff
	Pandemics	T Bollyky A Tooze

Note to table; I do appreciate that the allocation is arbitrary and therefore contentious….and that the table gives no indication of how long each "debate" lasted….Managerialism, for example, seems to have had several phases….and various forms of human rights were being argued throughout the entire period.
Nor do I try to justify detail with google analytics.
My purpose is simply impressionistic – to remind us of the ebb and flow of ideas…And, just perhaps, to wonder how the new fashions manage to escape sceptical challenge for so long…..

Introducing the blog

This blog has been running since I began to contemplate "hanging up my boots" after a career which had started in the late 1960s in "planning" work, moved on to economics and public administration and finished as a "consultant" in ex-communist countries in something called "institutional development". Talk about "reification"......!!

You might think that after 12 years this blog has said most of what there is to say – but I keep coming across books which throw new light on things. M*ost blogs have a specialist focus, be it economic, political, sociological or cultural* and apply that lens to the latest fashion of the day. This blog celebrates instead the butterfly approach and depends very much **on what catches my fancy – generally a book or article, sometimes an incident, painting or piece of music**. And I do like to offer excerpts from the books and articles I feel positive about – as distinct from offering opinions.

It's time, however, to do one of my periodic stock-takings of the blog. When it started (in 2009) it set out three aims-

- "This blog will try to make sense of the organisational endeavours I've been involved in; to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history (let alone hope).
- I read a lot and want to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination to read widely.
- A final motive for the blog is more complicated - and has to do with life and family. What have we done with our life? What is important to us?"

The first two objectives are still important. After 12 years, it's fairly obvious from the unfinished nature of my books on administrative reform ("*Change for the Better?*") and on social change ("*What is to be Done?*") that there's still work to be done – although I often feel I'm just going round in circles. And I'm still finding fascinating books and continue to have this urge to share relevant insights with posterity. But I should probably stop imposing these rather forbidding reading lists.

But the blog has **been weak on the third purpose**. Indeed one friend has queried the absence of the personal touch – feeling that the tone is too clinical and aseptic.
And it's certainly fair comment that the blog is a bit "scholastic". A couple of other friends have indeed called me a "scholar" – which I used to take as a compliment. Perhaps they meant "bloodless!?
As I move through my "autumn days" and feel the approach of winter, the "settling of final accounts" (in the spiritual sense) should, certainly, loom larger. Charles Handy is a real inspiration here – someone constantly challenging himself and making fresh choices every decade or so about where to put the energies and skills he's been endowed with

One of my favourite fellow-bloggers is Canadian Dave Pollard who is constantly offering valuable insights from his life experience – he is a few years younger than me. A lot of this touches on **inter-personal relations – one of my weak areas**.

In that spirit let me apply the Johari Window

	strong Known to me weak	
Strong Known to others Weak	**Open** "The Arena"	**Blind** The "blind corner"
	Hidden "The Façade"	**Unknown**

Our public self is something we try to control – but rarely succeed in. People notice things about us which we ourselves are not necessarily aware of (our blind corners). **Friends should be helpful here – but we often resent critical comment and they soon learn to shut up**…

From 1990 I've had a nomadic life – living in some ten different countries – generally leader of teams in which I would make a few new friends. Both **the contexts and my particular role were very different** from those in which I had spent the previous 20 years.
But I was very aware of this – even so, it took me almost a decade before I was fully up to speed and confident that my skills were producing results. Those skills were broadly the same mix of political and scholastic I had used in my previous life - but the context was so very different. And my new skill was being sensitive to that and making the appropriate adjustments to the tools I used.
As a Team Leader, I had, of course, to be sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of the members of the team – but it's almost impossible to shake off one's cultural assumptions and I carried the baggage then of a Brit still proud of what our democratic tradition had given the world (!!!). In the past decade, in Bulgaria and Romania, I've deepened my understanding of cultural contexts - and am still learning.....

I write in English – but literally a handful of Brits read the blog. Americans are its biggest fans making up 30% of readers (for which I'm so deeply grateful) - with Russians, curiously, coming in next at 15% and no other country having more than 5%. But **the scale of non-English readership is an argument for keeping the posts short**.
Because I have the time to read widely; live on Europe's edge; and have been out of my home country for more than 30 years, I have perhaps developed a bit of the outsider's perspective….But I remain painfully aware of my shortcomings in the inter-personal field - I learned so much when I first did the Belbin test....
Charles Handy's Inside Organisations - 21 ideas for managers includes the Johari window as one of the ideas. It's a delightful and easy read which I strongly recommend

What I am really trying to say is that I have to recognise that I have always been a bit "distant" in my relations with others. Indeed, as a young politician who was quickly given responsibilities, I was seen as a bit arrogant – when that was the last thing I actually felt. It was rather a defence

mechanism. Ernest Schumacher (author of "Small is Beautiful") put our usual approach into superb perspective in 1973 when he wrote -

> "*There are four sorts of worthwhile learning*
> *· learning about things*
> *- learning about oneself*
> *· learning how others see us*
> *· learning how we see others*"

I was slow to learn about myself – **let alone the other dimensions**. Despite undergoing some sessions of **psychotherapy** in the late 1980s, I was too much of a "word merchant" to allow mere words to get inside my brain and challenge my being.
It's only recently I've been willing to be open about that experience all of 30 plus years ago which, at the time, it wasn't possible to discuss. Philip Toynbee was one of the rare people who had actually written about it – I learned later that Winston Churchill used the euphemism of "black dog" to refer to his episodes. And about the only popular book about the subject was Dorothy Rowe's Depression – a way out of your prison (1983)
How times have changed – with credit being due to characters such as Stephen Fry and Alasdair Campbell who were amongst the first to go public and to encourage others to be open about a condition which touches most of us at some time in our lives.

> One of my favourite books is Robin Skynner and John Clease's Life – and how to survive it (1993) A therapist and leading British comic have a Socratic dialogue about the initial stages of everyone's development – as babies weaning ourselves from our mothers, learning about the wider environment and coping with our feelings. The understanding the principles of healthy (family) relationships and then use these to explore the preconditions for healthy organisations and societies: and for leadership viz -
> - valuing and respecting others
> - ability to communicate
> - willingness to wield authority firmly but always for the general welfare and with as much consultation as possible while handing power back when the crisis is over)
> - capacity to face reality squarely
> - flexibility and willingness to change
> - belief in values above and beyond the personal or considerations of party.

It took a massive change of role and circumstances before I came across an early edition of "A Manager's Guide to Self-Development" by Mike Pedler et al which made me aware of a range of self-evaluation tools such as the Belbin Test of team roles which you can try out on yourself here. When I did it for the first time with my team of the moment, it was quite a revelation. I had assumed that I was a "leader". What I discovered was that I was a "resource person" ie good at networking and sharing information – which was exactly right.
Harrison and Bramson's The Art of Thinking (1982) was also a revelation for me - indicating that people have very different ways of approaching problems and that we will operate better in teams if we (a) understand what our own style is and (b) that others think in different ways. The authors suggest we have 5 styles – "synthetist", "pragmatist", "idealist", "realist" and "analyst" and, of course, combinations thereof.

I regret now that I came late to an understanding of the interpersonal - the question I now have is how people can avoid my fate. Is it enough that there are so many books around for people to stumble on? Or should it now be an integral part of undergraduate work? Perhaps it is?

Dave Pollard is one of the few bloggers whose posts I generally read in full – always thoughtful, generally provocative. This post is typical - professing lack of interest in what people had to say about themselves in CVs or expressions of future hopes – but preferring rather to suggest……

six "leading questions" that might evoke some kind of useful sense of who someone is and what they care about - and possibly assess whether the person you're talking with might be the potential brilliant colleague, life partner, inspiring mentor or new best friend you've been looking for. These are the questions:

1. What adjectives or nouns would you use to describe yourself that differentiate you from most other people? When and how did these words come to apply to you?

2. Describe the most fulfilling day you can imagine, some day that might realistically occur in the next year. Why would it be fulfilling? What are you doing now that might increase its likelihood of happening?

3. What do you care about, big picture, right now? What would you mourn if it disappeared? What do you ache to have in your life? What would you work really long and hard to conserve or achieve? How did you come to care about this?

4. What is your purpose, right now? Not your role or occupation, but the thing you're uniquely gifted and inspired to be doing, something the world needs. What would elate you if you achieved it, today, this month, in the next year? What would devastate you if you failed, or didn't get to try? How did this become your purpose?

5. What's your basic belief about why you, and other humans, exist? Not what you believe is right or important (or what you, or humans 'should' do or be), but why you think we are the way we are now, and why you think we evolved to be where we are. It's an existential question, not a moral one. How did you come to this belief?

6. What's your basic sense of what the next century holds for our planet and our civilization? How do you imagine yourself coping with it? How did you come to this belief?

These are not easy questions, and asking them might prove intimidating or even threatening to some people, which is why in the last post I suggested volunteering your own answer to each question yourself first, in a form such as "Someone asked me the other day… and I told them…". It's also why there are supplementary questions to each, to get the person you're asking started. And the last supplementary question in each group lends itself to telling a story, since that's what we're most comfortable with. Even then, some of these questions will stop many people cold, which might tell you something about them right there.

Introducing the 2021 posts

For two years now, the world has been in the grip of the pandemic – but the subject appears in the blog only in the context of my continuing interest in (if not fixation with) the capacity of the "machinery of state".

That is, of course, a metaphor - and metaphors, as George Orwell warned us in his classic 1946 essay "Politics and the English language", can and do insidiously shape the way we think and communicate. The blog has a bit of a hang-up about clarity of language and had quite a few posts this year **trying to identify the elements of effective writing** - indeed an amusing Kurt Vonnegut video was the subject of the year's very first post. So I thought I would bring these posts together along with recent and revealing books about the UK press and also more practical advice about how to construct text that people actually want to read. This forms the **first section of the collection**

In the past decade, we've been deluged by hundreds of books about the various **threats liberal democracy is facing** – very few of them worth reading. David Runciman's How Democracy Ends (2017) which I wrote about last year is one of the exceptions and uses the metaphor of a "mid-life crisis" to explore 4 different ways in which democracy might end – a coup; catastrophes such as ecological or pandemics; technological takeover; or "improved systems". This year, I found myself writing about the appalling state of US democracy and doing an entire series of posts about the slide in the "rule of law" in Europe. I thought it would be useful to gather them together and attempt a considered introductory summary. This **forms the second part of the collection** - although the trouble with such discussions is that they breed pessimism, if not fatalism.

The activist in me wants to identify the tools which would help find a way out of the mess. A question the blog has pursued a lot this year – sparked off by difficulties in forming governments in Bulgaria and Romania - is **how a country might go about the task of reinventing itself**? So far, politicians in this part of the world have not demonstrated any interest in such a question – but that's no reason for civil society to ignore it. **Section 3** looks at such tools as Good Governance and Anti-corruption - and wonders why reconciliation efforts don't seem to have been attempted.

This leads fairly naturally into a (shorter but none the less important) section (number 4) on **Cultural Values and World Views** which, of course, is so politically unacceptable that noone is willing to talk about it. It is, very much, the elephant in the room. I understand that, as an outsider, there is nothing I can do about this – except ask awkward questions

Since 2009 this blog has recorded my effort to make sense of a venal system which seemed out of control – with posts containing extensive hyperlinks and book excerpts. For the past few years I have been collecting the more relevant of these to put a little book together to answer a series of questions I had posed 20 years ago in a short paper exploring the question of where I should be putting my energies. I lived through most of the Thatcher regime and my original note did register that something irrevocable was happening to the political system. But, **when the global financial crash came in 2008, I too readily attributed its causes to what had been**

unleashed by UK and US policies in the 1980s.

What I have begun to understand in the last few years is that the sources of our malaise are both earlier and more complex. And that I belong to the generation which unleashed a new spirit of disrespect for the past – and one of entitlement and hubris into the world. Hence the mea culpa implicit in the title "**Dispatches to the Next Generation**" I have given the posts which form **section 5**

One of the odd things to happen - as I tried in the following decade to make sense of it all – was the speed with which bad things got worse and how quickly what was I thought was an original insight became part of the conventional wisdom. At the start of the millennium, for example, the reputation of the political class sill ran high and the word "capitalism" was rarely used – 20 years later both were the subject of ridicule and contempt.

The pandemic, the onslaught of Artificial Intelligence and climate change are clearly major turning points which suggest that we are indeed at the dawn of a new era.

I was, curiously, distracted by **Postmodernism** during the year and **section 6** tries to explore what people thought they meant when they used the phrase, whether it had outlived its usefulness and what the new era might be called.

Section 7 gathers up the miscellaneous posts – a lot which are book reviews - and ranges in subject matter from futurism to patriotism

By the end of the year the blog had posted the largest number of posts since 2014 – but that hasn't been rewarded in terms of clicks. These trundle along at 300 a month - hitting double that in the summer months. In December, however, it declined to the lowest number of clicks for 5 years. My personal feeling is that this year's collection is the best ever – so my readership numbers are immaterial. I write for myself.

I owe my readers one apology – some of the hyperlinks (particularly the Zbook titles) don't work.

1. STORY-TELLING

For the past thirty years I have lived in countries in which English is not the language of the street – nor that which comes naturally to those I talk with. That quickly made me very sensitive to the very different meanings words are capable of holding. One of my favourite bloggers had a thought-provoking article about "The Illusion of Communication" which he starts thus –

The cognitive linguist George Lakoff describes how our language and our conditioning, from very early in our lives, form our beliefs, hopes and expectations (collectively, our worldviews), and that the way we think is primarily through frames and metaphors (we learn metaphorical thinking at age two). Our worldviews in turn directly affect what we do and don't do.

"The theory that communication is embedding thoughts and ideas into language and then transmitting them to another who then assimilates the same thoughts and ideas, simply doesn't work", George says. Only if the sender and receiver share worldviews, frames and metaphors will there be understanding, and without understanding there is no communication. And what is not understood — which is everything that doesn't fit the listener's worldview and ways of thinking — will simply not be heard. We are also, George asserts, incapable of learning about anything we don't care about, since we will not even be trying to understand.

Pollard then goes on to explore how few of the messages managers try to communicate in the workplace are actually understood – and that's when they're actually speaking the same language! Whenever I spoke at courses and Conferences, I would always track down the interpreters and summarise for them the key messages I wanted to convey in my presentation.
Pollard is actually pretty pessimistic about our ability to share our thinking (let alone convince others) - suggesting that poems and pictures have more potential. I totally agree. I generally make sure that my presentations have a poem or a painting….It certainly wakes people up!

So, best, I think, to be an artist, to use the wiles of song and paint and poetry (full of metaphor and reframing) to slip into the spaces where the listener's or viewer's worldview is not locked tight, and to accept that, while your work may transport and even transform them, that will happen in ways you cannot control or even imagine.

And if you are not an artist, and disposed to muddle with the messy imprecision of words, you can only try to throw as many interesting, provocative, imaginative, ideas, possibilities, insights, connections, confirmations, refutations, imaginings, challenges, and stories at your poor, unsuspecting audience (hopefully articulately and fairly and not manipulatively), and see what sticks, what their lifelong conditioning has made them, just now, ready to hear, to entertain, and to admit.
In doing that, you might well change their conditioned beliefs, worldview, and future behaviours. Though of course, that only happened because your conditioned beliefs and worldview necessitated that you try to do so.
When it comes to communication, that's the best we can do, or hope for.

Orwell gave us a practical checklist of strategies for avoiding such mindless momentum of thought and the stale writing it produces:

"A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus:

- What am I trying to say?
- What words will express it?
- What image or idiom will make it clearer?
- Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you — even think your thoughts for you, to certain extent — and they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even yourself".

A year or so ago I stumbled on a useful format to help me present my thoughts more briefly and clearly – and that is a simple table with questions such as what had sparked off the thoughts and the basic message I wanted to leave with the reader. Take as an example this article on Economical writing *divided into 28 sections - each of which is headed by a delightfully short and clear statement or injunction viz*

The author (McCloskey)'s injunction	What I think (s)he Means
"Writing is the economist's craft"	Most economists are so focused on the message that they forget they are engaged in communications – which implies a reader
"Writing is thinking"	**Most writing is thinking aloud…trying to clarify one's own confusions….to be ready for an audience, it needs to go through about a dozen drafts**
"Rules can help, but bad rules hurt"	A lot of books have been written about how to improve one's writing style – some of them downright silly
"Be Thou clear"	Clarity is not the same as precision – and requires a lot of experiment and effort. Indeed I would rephrase the adage as "Strive to be Clear"
"The detailed rules are numerous"	**"most advice about writing is actually about rewriting"!**
"You too can be fluent"	**Contains some lovely advice about the process of composing and transposing one's thoughts and words**
"You will need tools"	On the importance of words
"Keep your spirits up, forge ahead etc"	**We've got to get the words flowing on the paper….don't be a perfectionist….it's just a first draft…many more to go!**
"Speak to an audience of human beings"	**Probably the most important point….who is the paper for? Imagine a typical reader!**
"Avoid boilerplate"	Don't use clichés or chunks of text everyone thinks they understand
"Control your tone"	You can (and probably should) be conversational – but if you want to be taken seriously don't joke around
"Paragraphs should have points"	**Readers hate to see several pages of only text. Break it up when you sense you're moving to a new point**
"Use tables and graphics – and make them readable"	**For me, crucial**

"Footnotes are nests for pedants"	Love it!
"Make your writing cohere"	Very interesting section with points I had never come across before
"Use your ear"	A sentence consists of a subject, verb and object, We often overburden with qualifying clauses.
"Avoid elegant variation"	Clumsy way of saying we should not use a lot of adjectives or adverbs to say the same thing
"Check and tighten; rearrange and fit"	**Priceless advice….we should be doing this all the time**
"Rhetorical questions?"	Interesting question
"Use verbs, active ones"	Some good points made
"Avoid words that bad writers use"	Some very useful examples given
"Be concrete"	Great example of circumlocution
"Be plain"	Cut out the flowery language
"Avoid cheap typotricks"	Don't use acronyms
"Avoid this, that, these, those"	Useful point
"Above all, look at your words"	**Words so easily take over our thoughts. Be suspicious of the words that come initially to mind ….**

Here's another table which I've constructed to whet your appetite for the contents of this section

Title	What sparked it off	Its basic message
Consultancy and Backbone	Wry reflections on on the term I had to use for a new career	Don't trust this breed
Things go up, down and round-about	Kurt Vonnegot lecture	As Joan Didion says, we all need stories
Pageants and poetry	Gorman's poem at Biden's inauguration	A question about which country is best able to express its moral values in an appropriate ceremony
Breaking news	Alan Rusbridger's memoir about editing The Guardian	A great story about how an editor and a newspaper coped with the huge changes which overtook the press in the last few decades
What is news?	An A-Z about the UK press	The differences between the "legacy" and "social" media
Tribalism in the UK media	A critical book about "The Guardian"; a book about "The Economist" and one about the gutter press	Newspapers and journals also have identities which say something about their readers and country
Seeing the text		Useful advice on how to find out if a book is worth reading
Writing styles non-fiction writing Words Against the current?	Realisation that it wasn't enough to designate someone a "good writer". I needed somehow to identify the ingredients	how to we describe someone's style? Examples of good writers
An exemplary writer Charles Handy – part II The Hungry Spirit in context	Taking Charles Handy as a case-study.	 And close reading of a couple of his books

Consultancy and Backbone

I was, for more than 20 years, a consultant (in **capacity, or institutional, development)** – in ex-communist countries. And I didn't like the term. When required to complete forms, I would describe myself as a "writer" since little of my work involved the give and take of consultancy - most of it required writing reports on the extent to which the project was complying with its "terms of reference". My Just Words – a sceptic's glossary defines a consultant as

> "a con-artist who behaves like a Sultan"

which is not an unreasonable way to sum up the attitude of those consultants who arrive in countries whose language they don't speak - and whose brief is to "modernise" systems in countries which were previously imperial or communist outposts. T**hat experience brought home to me the importance not just of words – but of concepts** which were enormously difficult to translate. And, in some cases, **went beyond mere language**. It was, after all, only in 2003 that Richard Nisbett produced his "Geography of Thought" which argued that different parts of the world looked at the world in very different ways – with Westerners focusing on detail and Asians on the context. Richard Lewis' "When Cultures Collide" (1996) doesn't quite go so far – looking simply at national differences in behaviour
For at least 20 years **my most important team appointment was that of the individual who could convey the subtleties of the exchanges** between myself and the "beneficiaries".
For an entire decade – in Central Asia and Bulgaria – I was extraordinarily fortunate but, in 2010, my luck ran out in China and I soon left that project
When I had to use people I didn't know – for example at Conferences – I made a point of giving the interpreters a short summary of the main points I would be making and discussing this in advance with them – to make sure they understood the concepts

Many of the countries in which I worked were very proud (Hungary) and/or fairly rich (Azerbaijan with oil). For whatever reason, its leaders felt they needed some "modernisation" – at least of an institutional sort. **Too many of the consultants who accompanied me, however, had a superior attitude to their hosts** – spouting the latest fashions in their particular country and conveniently forgetting that most of it was of very recent vintage.
There are tens of thousands of books about development – of both the "how to" and more critical sort. Since the new millennium, there has actually been a bit of a "mea culpa" mood – with the latest fashion known as "Doing Development Differently" or DDD in the acronyms beloved by technocrats.
Humility is a rare quality in this literature – but can be found in the writings of people such as Robert Chambers ("Can we know better?" 2017) and in the very powerful "Helping People Help Themselves" (2006) which explores what might happen if people actually took that phrase seriously.

One of my friends (another consultant!) has this great ability to smoke out bullshit. He goes into a project with open eyes; spots the nonsenses in expectations; and will then not just point out that the Emperor is naked but present practical solutions. In other words, **he uses his mind** – whereas most *consultants seem to have the attitude that this is a dangerous thing to do*. Better

to follow the letter of the contract – no matter how irrelevant to prevailing conditions.

For just over a decade I thoroughly enjoyed my work – particularly in Central Asia. And one of the things I really appreciated there is that I was working with people who didn't have to pretend they were seeking membership of the EU - and therefore took the projects on THEIR terms….For example, for reasons best known to themselves, one regime had landed itself with a Civil Service Law but really didn't want to venture any further into this unknown territory. Instead of twiddling my thumbs, I decided to use the accident of my office being in the Presidential Academy to work with a couple of their staff and some other individuals who spoke the language of reform - to produce not only a result which took everyone by surprise (a Civil Service Agency) but the first 3 books in the local language about public admin reform and HRM.

I made firm friends in such work but hope that I also set an example. Of what a few people can achieve if they have a vision, energy and commitment. Margaret Mead put it beautifully –

> *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has*

Sadly, that group will never contain a consultant – they watch their backs too carefully!
In 2009 the EC produced a new "Backbone strategy" in response to a (fairly critical) assessment by the EC Court of Auditors of the impact of the EC's programme of project development to developing and ex-communist countries – projects led by consultants. You can get a sense of it from this short paper I wrote in 2011 as I prepared a longer critique for a NISPAcee Conference in Varna (called The Long Game – not the logframe)
It's ironic that the post which attracts the largest number of hits (by far) is a short one I did on "strengthening the backbone" more than a decade - from which I try to warn people off!
If there's one thing which consultants don't have, it's backbone!!!

Things go up...and down...and round-about

A lot of clever people have devoted a lot of intellectual effort to suggest that all novels can be reduced to 6-7 basic plots (are being variants of the rags to riches story).
As usual, visuals say it all much more clearly and noone recounts it better than the sadly-missed Kurt Vonnegut who gave this hilarious short presentation (with spanish sub-titles) to demonstrate that the basic plots narrate how things go up and down.
His **vertical axis** measures good and bad outcomes; and the **horizontal** one time.
I won't give a spoiler to what is a fantastic presentation – suffice to say that Hamlet and a poor teenage orphan both figure in the plot outlines!

Regular readers know that one of the things this blog tries to do is to map recent intellectual history – that's one the reasons for the long annotated bibliographies which crop up in the posts.
So an obvious question is **whether similar patterns can be identified in non-fiction books.**
And a review in the current issue of the New York Review of Books alerted me to a book - namely Robert Shiller's "Narrative Economics – how stories go viral and drive economic events"

(2019) - which explores how people have tried to make sense of what was happening to the economy – be it inflation, monopoly, boom and bust, inequality, automation, bubbles, or austerity.

With Vonnegut as inspiration, it didn't take me long to work out that non-fiction books also have plots and narratives. **Things go up and down - and the authors spend most of their time describing why and how this has happened – with a few pages on what those in power should be doing to bring things back up again**......Books about global warming will now add a comment about what the ordinary citizen should be doing....

And, of course, a note of panic has been discernible since the new millennium – just look at the titles - "The Long Descent", "Extinction", "The End of Progress", "Requiem for a Species", "Collapse", "The Five Stages of Collapse".

So most of the Vonnegut-type graphs slope downwards these days – only the likes of Stephen Pinker will have upward-sloping curves, with Branko Milanovic's Elephant curve being a complex outlier.

Pageants, Identity and Poetry

It was important to see the better side of the United States on display at the January Presidential Inauguration. The optimism was perhaps a bit forced this time, the usual nationalist note more questionable. I'm sure I wasn't the only one heckling Biden's rhetorical flourishes. The colourful figure of [young poet Amanda Gorman was a superb counterpoint](#) – almost an ironic comment on that aspect….

Such events (and the State of the Union Message) **are important opportunities for countries to remind themselves of** – **if not refresh - their values. An opportunity, however, which most countries flunk.**

Take, for example, the glitter and pomp of the British Queen's Speech marking **the start of a parliamentary session - when the UK government's programme is presented to the nation.** What we actually see are the ermine robes of Lords and Ladies – reminding us that, although the feudal element of the system may now be gone (if very recently), these Lords and Ladies have been elevated to their position by a thoroughly rotten system of appointments - in the gift of a few people…..

And what it conceals is the reality that it's actually no longer the only show in town – with the Scottish Government since 1999 presenting its own distinctive programme to Scottish society

In a few days (January 25th) we'll see Scots all over the world coming together to celebrate the Scottish values we've long seen embodied in the life of our national poet, [Rabbie Burns](#). A ploughman and then customs official, Burns wrote in revolutionary times; understood its hypocrisies; and sympathized with egalitarian struggles. Not for nothing did [the Russians also take him to their hearts](#).

It's puzzling, therefore, that more countries don't follow suit and have annual celebrations of poets who embody national values such as Shakespeare and Goethe - or even better for my money, [Brecht.](#)

Governments always find it impossible to distinguish their own short-term political agenda from

the deeper issue of national identity – witness the mess Gordon Brown made of [the debate about British identity](#).

For my money, the only country which has managed to create a mechanism which gives the opportunity for a proper expression of moral values is…..Germany whose apolitical Presidential addresses have, since [Richard von Weizsaecker](#), had great power

Breaking News – the remaking of journalism and why it matters now

The media used to be described as one of the key features of democracy – for its ability to hold power to scrutiny. So much so it was actually called [The Fourth Estate](#) – with the Church, nobility and commoners being the first three and the earliest use of the term in a book by Thomas Carlyle in 1787:

> *"Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all."*

How quickly things have changed – with the mainstream media now dismissed as "fake news" - and social media being most people's first "go to" source of news.

I've just finished a [superbly-written story of the challenges faced by the editor of the UK's most honourable newspaper - The Guardian](#) - during his stint at the helm from 1995 to 2015 which included -

- Dramatically **declining advertising revenue**
- A more demanding and interactive readership
- of not only global digital and print editions but of a weekend title, The Observer – requiring three separate teams
- **law suits**, the most famous of which was conducted by a Minister of the Crown. Jonathan Aitken
- **government pressures** (Britain enjoys no media protection such as the US Second Amendment)
- the infamous **phone hacking** conducted on both the public and major political figures by the Murdoch Empire and other "Tabloids" who pour their poison on British society
- the **Wikipedia leaks** in which The Guardian played a central part (with Der Spiegel and the New York Post)
- the **Snowden revelations**

The book's title is "Breaking News" - it reads like a political thriller and should be read by everyone interested in what's been happening to newspapers. I hadn't realized, for example, that The Guardian was one of the first English-speaking newspapers to experiment, in the early years of the internet, with more interactive methods of reaching readers. Nor that it had received global awards for its various innovations…

> ***This was what we thought we knew around the middle of 2006.***
> - *Newspapers were going to find their traditional revenues – particularly in classified advertising and, probably, in cover price – eaten into over coming years.*
> - *Many newspaper managements would naturally respond by cutting costs. At the same time they would need to invest significantly in the digital future against the day when new technologies might determine future reading habits; and when significant amounts of advertising might well migrate to the internet.*

- *None of this would happen smoothly. There would be profound jolts along the way. We – and others – could expect to lose lots of money in the coming years if we had any chance of making the transition.*
- *In a rapidly converged world, newspapers would have to ask themselves whether they remained a purely text medium. And they were going to have to face the fact that younger readers, especially, were questioning previously accepted notions of journalistic authority.*
- *We would have to get used to the idea that audiences were fragmenting and that many people were increasingly finding non-conventional news sources a valuable addition, if not a ready substitute, for mainstream media.*
- *Newspapers had to decide how much they embraced these new forms of discourse and dissemination or whether they stood apart from them. Should we be of the web, or simply on it?*
- *Thousands of websites would aggregate what we do, syndicate it, link it, comment on it, sneer at it, mash it up, trash it, monetise it, praise it and attempt to discredit it – in some cases all at once. We were going to have to be more transparent about what we did and earn trust in this new world.*
- *But it was hard to see that many would actually go to the risk and the expense of setting up a global network of people whose only aim was to find things out, establish if they're true, and write about them quickly, accurately and comprehensibly. The blogo-sphere, which was frequently parasitical on the mainstream media it so remorselessly critiqued, couldn't ever hope to replicate that. That – assuming people remained interested in serious news – should give us a huge advantage.*
- *Against that, the digital world could do many things much better than we could currently do – including niche fragmentation, multimedia, voice, diversity, connectivity, range, scale, speed, responsiveness and community.*
- *Our cost base was simultaneously our best protection and a mill stone around our necks. Between them the Guardian, Observer and Guardian Unlimited employed well over 600 journalists, more than two dozen of them based around the world. That was half the size of the NYT and a tenth the size of the BBC, but still a significant investment in serious journalism. We could be sunk by our cost base, or it could make what we did difficult for others to replicate.*
- *No internet start-up on earth would ever contemplate such an investment in expensive, noncommercially productive people. The Yahoos and Googles of this world were explicit: they had no interest in creating content. They did, however, want to do interesting things with other people's content. That could be good for us. Or it might not. Google could be our friend or our enemy. Or both.*
- *We could not survive into a newspaper-less future as a UK-only news company. The audience simply wasn't rich enough or large enough to support us – and an advertising-supported operation could only work if we could deliver much larger numbers.*
- *That meant taking our non-British readers more seriously. We would, in particular, have to expand our North American operation.*
- *There could be no hope of trying to build a US audience with a paywall.*

One of the many things I admired in the book was Rusbridger's generosity of spirit – evident in his tributes to the support foreign journalists and editors gave in his times of need (in stark contrast to British colleagues); his appreciation of readers' feedback and loyalty; and his frequent references to those books and surveys he found helpful.

What is Proper Journalism?

The "Breaking News" book by the former editor of "The Guardian", Alan Rusbridger, contrasts the two worlds of what he calls the "legacy media" with that of the social…… and raises many profound issues for us as global citizens – eg

- can anyone really understand what's going on in the world?
- do we not just see what we are looking for?
- did the legacy media not deserve some of the kickback – given its hectoring "top-down" tone?
- can we sustain the prejudice that the social media is sheer distraction? Rusbridger suggests that the new Twitter thread suggests otherwise….
- how can the legacy media fight back?

*By 2017 the "**legacy media**" **had** developed an understandable obsession with the **GAFAT companies** – **Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Twitter** – which, in their view, were working to different rules on a hopelessly tilted playing field.*

*The old-media view was simple: the "Gafaters" **stole their content**; built an audience around it; sold that audience to advertisers; **gave almost nothing** in return; took virtually **no responsibility for the content they hosted**; got a **free pass on the regulations that burdened traditional media**; and – to cap it all – **paid virtually no tax**.*
It was all, in other words, deeply unfair. But, however unjust, many companies felt they had no choice but to play by the new rules. A Reuters Institute report in late 2017 discovered fatalism within newsrooms and management. Social media was, they nearly all agreed, a vital bridge to the next generation of audiences. As the platforms grew, so legacy media – which could never dream of rivalling the Gafaters for scale – would weaken.

The number one aim of the legacy media was to get Facebook to admit it was a publisher, not just a pipe down which content flowed. That meant they would have to face the same responsibilities – and costs and regulation – as others. To the Daily Mail, Facebook was a

> *'deeply tarnished, filth-peddling, taxdodging, pusillanimous, terror-abetting behemoth which targets the vulnerable with bile and hatred'.*

Not all the traditional players would use such language. But, as unease grew over the extent to which Facebook's laissez-faire processes were being manipulated to dark ends, there was something of a broader backlash against companies which were seen as greedy, out of control, arrogant and destructive of social and democratic fabrics.

There were demands that the GAFAT giants should do more to support old-fashioned journalism. But Zuckenburg turned the question around. '**This journalism you think we should be supporting, what does it look like?**'

It was a genuine enquiry, and the glances among his colleagues suggested it was one they had been grappling with themselves. If you think we should be sharing our revenues in the cause of some kind of public benefit, how do you define that benefit?
For all its mildness and politeness, it was the deadliest and most profound question. "What is journalism? Who gets to do it? Do you all agree on a core set of standards and ethics and methods? Do

you all agree on a common concept of public interest? Do you want us to support the gutter press? Or just local news or investigative news? Help us understand".

There were senior figures within both Facebook and Google who were very troubled by aspects of the information chaos they had partly enabled, and who valued some – but not all – of the things that the old information order produced. They felt most traditional news executives didn't understand algorithms. Some of them would privately admit they didn't understand journalism.

Try drawing a map of things we call 'news'. There is straight news and adversarial news; subjective news and objective news. There is news as public service and news as entertainment. There is exclusive news and commodity news. There are investigations; there are campaigns and there is advocacy. There is breaking news and there is slow, considered news. There is analysis, or news with context; explanatory news. There is news as activism. There is opinion dressed up as news; there's eyewitness news; firstperson news; or scoops of interpretation. There may even be sponsored news or advertising dressed up to look like news.

The potential of Twitter?
Like most grumpy old men, I have a stock response whenever I hear talk of Twitter….It's one of the things which has poisoned our exchanges. It invites abuse. But Rusbridger points to the use of the "thread" by specialists as demonstrating the potential offered by the social media

> *In the binary argument over journalism in a digital world it became an article of faith to some that the internet was largely dross. You needed professionals to bring you reliable information because only they could be trusted [insert brain surgeon comparison]. **Twitter – with its restrictive character limit – was widely held up as a place of simplicities, hatred and ignorance. All that was true, but only partly**.*
> *If, as a journalist, that's all you chose to believe then you were blind to how **Twitter was also a place of expertise, intelligent debate and genuine dialogue**.*
>
> *At first, they were constricted by the format. But then came the invention of a new format: the thread – a sequence of tweets making an argument or advancing a proposition. Suddenly the straitjacket of 140 or 280 characters melted away.*
> *In the right hands the thread is a fascinating new form. Over many tweets a writer can develop quite a sophisticated argument. Each tweet can be accompanied by a screenshot or link to supporting evidence. Each tweet can be individually commented on or shared.*
>
> *The truth is that it is difficult to map the new eco-system of information in a neat way with – at different ends of a spectrum – 'proper' mainstream media and 'other stuff'. Much of the information being produced by nonprofessionals is just as reliable, informative and useful as that produced by journalists. Vice versa, some information produced 'professionally' is weak, unreliable, unethical . . . and even untruthful. You could call it 'fake'.*
>
> *On the eve of Donald Trump taking office, the respected NYU media academic Jay Rosen published a bleak blog post titled '**Winter is Coming**' in which he argued that 'so many things are happening to disarm and disable serious journalism . . . at the darkest time in American history since WW1'.*
> *- He began with an ever-more severe economic crisis for news combined with the lowest levels of trust in news media in living memory, citing the First World War as a time of particular censorship and suppression of dissent.*

- He added in a 'broken and outdated' model for political journalism (based on 'access' or 'inside' reporting which misses broader connections with the public).
- Then came a lack of diversity in newsrooms; weak leadership and 'thin institutional structures' in the American press. The mistrust of the media was mirrored by low levels of trust in most institutions and their leaders – the very people journalists were writing about.
- Then came an organised movement on the political right to discredit mainstream journalism and the increasingly dim prospect that there was even a fact-based debate to which journalists could usefully contribute. Media companies increasingly subordinated news and political debate to entertainment values; while finally, Facebook was slowly taking charge of the day-to-day relationship with users of the news system.

Those who enjoyed "Breaking News" will find Rusbridger's News – and How to Use (2020) an even more interesting read. It's presented as an alphabetic glossary

Update; I'm always on the look-out for independent journalism – the UK Canary and US Mint press look worth reading

Tribalism

I devoted a fair number of my collected 2019 posts to the question of what element of British – or rather **English - identity** had persuaded them to cast themselves adrift from the Continent (the posts have been gathered at pp133-196 of the collection). In my search for culprits I even looked at novelists. But one of the first places I looked was that of the British media whose role was well summarized by this comment

We are paying the price of our media. British journalism thinks of itself as uniquely excellent. It is more illuminating to think of it as uniquely awful. Few European countries have newspapers that are as partisan, misleading and confrontational as some of the overmighty titles in this country. The possibility of Brexit could only have happened because of the British press

And more extensively analysed in this article in a French journal .
But it is perhaps Tabloid Britain – constructing a community through language Martin Conboy (2006) which best conveys the huge pulling power of the popular press in Britain and the role it has played in appealing to the worst in the british voter.

Journalists are our crucial link with the world of both power and of ideas. Usually they are reporting what others want them to say – but the best of them have their own voice.
Each of us gravitates to a newspaper which tends to reflect our worldview – in that sense we are **all deeply tribal.**
My particular poison is "The Guardian" one of whose editors (Alan Rusbridger) has produced a couple of fascinating books which I parsed in a couple of posts at the beginning of the year. "The Guardian" has a world-wide reputation – indeed its American sales outstrip those of the British market.
At the very end of the second post, I had slipped in the information that a critical appraisal of the paper had just been published with the revealing title Capitalism's Conscience – 200 years of the Guardian ed D Freedman (2021)

I hadn't realised that this followed another book-long analysis of the even more significant global role another UK journal has played – namely the weekly Economist. Liberalism at Large – the world according to The Economist by Alexander Zevin was produced in 2019 and was reviewed in the New Yorker by the inimitable Pankaj Mishra

Seeing a Text
Some months back I offered some hints to identify whether a book was worth reading

- **check the Introduction – or Preface**. This is the author's chance to show (s)he understands how overwhelmed we are by the choices; to offer us a convincing argument about why (s)he has to inflict yet another book on us. And the best way to do that is to give a brief summary of what others have written and identify the missing elements which make a book necessary. Books which fail even to attempt that prove that the author is living in a bubble...

- Look for **a summary of each chapter**.....I have always liked the old habit of prefacing a book chapter with an explanation of what that chapter will deal with. When I got hold recently of George Bernard Shaw's The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism; (1928) it was to discover that his Table of Contents has no fewer than 33-pages...

- Look, at the end, for a **(short) list of recommended reading**, ideally with notes explaining the choice. Most books have a long "bibliography" which, I've taken to calling a "virility test" - demonstrating nothing more than (a barely compressed sense of) superiority. I want instead to see a shorter (and annotated) list for several reasons - partly to smoke out the author's prejudices; partly to see how honest (s)he is; and partly to see how well (s)he writes

- **Make sure that the writing is clear** – with suitable use of graphics and tables which are needed both to break up and to illustrate the text….

But I also need to be persuaded that the book in question has three other features --
- respects the basic facts about an issue;
- has a coherent "narrative structure" (here's a good example of a book which lacked this)
- refers to the various sides of the key arguments on the issue

And this can be done only by checking the reviews.

These, of course, are just my views. Different sorts of people have different methods of productive or active reading.
Those who want to know more about how to extract most benefit from a book should have a look at the classic How to Read a Book (1965) by Mortimer Adler whose first edition was actually written in 1940. Part I is best skimmed – the meat of the book is from chapter 7
Adler divides what he calls "inspectional reading" into two categories. The first is skimming; the second is superficial reading.

Skimming is the most effective tool for discovering those truly great books you want to read. If upon skimming a book, you realize it doesn't hold your interest or have new information, that's a success. It means you've made your way through a title in just a few minutes instead of spending a

21

couple hours to arrive at that conclusion. If you realize you are interested in the text, you've guaranteed you'll enjoy reading the entire book.

For any non-fiction book we read, we should be able to answer a few questions after spending just a few minutes with the book. First, what kind of book is it? Is it explanatory or expounding? Is the purpose of the book to explain how something works, or to convince the reader to take a certain action? Broadly, what is the author trying to say? The purpose of skimming is to learn these answers quickly – at a bird's perspective – and have a feel for the style of the author.

This is actually an excerpt from a post with the great title of <u>How to never read another boring book</u> by Elizabeth Peterson in which she shares her approach to active reading.

Chapter names and summaries
Inspect the table of contents for chapter titles and descriptions. The chapter titles will reveal how the information is organized. Older books often include descriptions or outlines about the organization of individual chapters. This is also useful for when you want to read about a specific idea or piece of research.

Index
Look through the index to see the individuals, concepts, studies, etc., the author references in the book. This is will give you an idea of what ideas or research, if any, the book presents, and a blueprint of their arguments. You'll also be able to see quickly whether the book covers any ideas or ground that is new to you. Additionally, you might choose to go straight to a certain chapter to see the research on a given topic.

Publisher's Blurb and Preface
The publisher's blurb often includes a summary of the author's arguments and conclusion, making it a great resource for answering basic questions about the book. You may be inclined to dismiss the publisher's blurb as empty praise to convince you to read or buy the book or simple adulation for the author – and you may be right in some instances. However, you should definitely read the blurb to find out.

Likewise, in their prefaces or "notes to the reader", authors often include interesting observations or references which didn't make it into the final version of the book. The preface also usually includes the author's hopes for the books stated clearly.

Introduction
If the book has an introduction, read it. There is often so much good information added here that the author thought was important, but for whatever reason, couldn't include in the body of the book. Often, a chapter or passage got cut from the final version of the book, so the author included those resources or ideas for the reader in an introduction. With older books, the introduction often explains the cultural setting and ideas the author was addressing at the time. Contemporary titles often include references to similar or related work, for you to read next. The editor may also have notes explaining why the book is structured in a particular way.

Final chapter
Finally, look through the end of the final chapter. As Adler advises, "Few authors are able to resist the temptation to sum up what they think is new and important about their work in these pages. You do not want to miss this, even though, as sometimes happens, the author himself may be wrong in his judgment."

Having read all or most of these key passages, we can now explain the conversation the book is joining, the major arguments the author includes, and their conclusion. Instead of sinking a couple hours into a book we may or may not finish, we now know the major points and whether we want to read the entire book. This brief skimming may very well be all the time you need to spend with a book.

And here's [another fascinating read – which introduces me to the benefits of a book's Index](#)!

- *The index is everything*
- *Use the Table Of Contents as the skeleton*
- *Preview with the preface*

The Index is Everything
You can take any path you want, but for me, the index is my first stop after the title. Armed with a guess of the book's point of view from the title, I use the index to understand what topics we're going to cover and hopefully how we're going to approach them.
If you want to play along, open that non-fiction book you haven't read yet — or just see the example below. Look through the index, notice what topics are covered, and more importantly, at what depth. If an author is spending a good deal of pages on something, make a note of that topic.
Remember, what we're trying to do with this process is answer two questions: what is this book about, and, am I interested in reading it? I'll take a look at a random book from my bookshelf and look through the index, right now. Turns out this book is [Homo Deus](#) by Yuval Noah Harari.
Ok, first index page...boom! What do I see? What stands out? What topics get a lot of coverage? What seems interesting or out of place?

What is this book trying to get across?
For Homo Deus, it looks like this author is trying to set up a new paradigm called Dataism. It might be related to scaling human cooperation, and he seems to be supporting his thesis with some tenets from techno-humanism, pre-existing religions, and probably some AI for extra spice.
Am I interested? Eh, kinda. Enough to delve deeper for sure.

The **Table Of Contents is the Skeleton of a Book**
Once I'm armed with a handy-dandy list of topics culled from the index, I compare my index map with the good old TOC (table of contents). The TOC is the skeleton of the book, and the terms from the indexes you grabbed earlier are like the fleshed-out limbs.
The TOC shows the way the author wants you to understand the progression of the book. (Like the title, authors also think about what the TOC looks like.) It gives you the big picture of the approach. Then the index helps you fill in the types and level of details.
You could start your process at the TOC if you want to, but I have found that starting with the index and overlaying that research on top of TOC is most helpful.

It looks like Harari takes a historical view of humanity as he leads us to what is coming next—if I can assume as much, because it's the final chapter of his book: "The Data Religion." And when I look at the index and account for the way page numbers and chapters align, I can see the stuff about "Dataism" is overlaid against a chapter titled "The Data Religion."
My best guess right now is that this book is about how we will organize ourselves using data in the future instead of religion.
Do this for a few minutes. Build a rough map in your mind of the book. It's sort of like connecting the dots between the chapter titles in the TOC and the topics and page numbers listed in the index. All

of the above takes 5-15 minutes and is really a simplified version of "[inspectional reading](),"
popularized by Adler and van Doren, which is just a more methodological skimming or "pre-reading"
process. Once we've answered the question of what the book is about, the remaining question—and
indeed the main question—remains.

Do you care?
If not, throw the notecard in the front pages somewhere (for future reference) and toss the book
back on the shelf. Maybe, if you are interested in knowing more, spend an hour or two reading some
of the sections that interest you. For instance, with Homo Deus, I'm likely to read a few index points
and the final chapter on Dataism.
But, before I do any of that, I always skim the preface.

Preview with the Preface
In the preface, good authors will tell you right away what the book is about and where it is going. In
that way, the preface is like the trailer to a movie. Maybe you see Ben Affleck and Pee Wee Herman
are co-starring and lose interest. Maybe the author makes a point you never thought of, and you
become more interested. Follow that instinct.
I'll get through a preface in about 5 minutes. Skimming is my friend—I don't need to memorize or
meditate too deeply on it. It's mostly just to make sure my mental map is on the money.
The preface and the index are indispensable to understanding what the book is about. So far, all we
are trying to understand is: what is this book trying to get across?

How to Extract the Knowledge Nuggets
So how do I get those useful knowledge nuggets? I use the index map (page numbers) and again, I
follow my interests or problem-solving needs. I start by reading the pages corresponding to the
seemingly useful parts from the index. Yeah, right in the middle of the book. Feel free to just start
reading on page 212. Seriously.
For instance, from the index map above, do I really want to understand what the "biological poverty
line" is? Or did some other topic seem more interesting? This is where I break free of the author's
structure, and delve into the book to find the pieces I need or that I want to know.
I suggest following a topic over multiple chapters, so if the author starts talking about something on
page 2, picks it up again on pages 25-29, and then again at 101-105, read those pages in sequence.
Other interesting topics might be mentioned along the way. If so, add those to your map and find
their places in the index. Let curiosity and interest take the lead.

Interact with the Book
Writing in the margins and taking notes is also a huge part of this process for me; underlining words
and marking up pages. I like to draft points to myself—notes, ideas, thoughts. If it's a hard copy of a
book I'll use a pencil. If it's digital, I'll use the built-in notes app.
One thing I appreciate about notations in a book is that it allows you to track your thinking about the
book over time. If you do end up coming back later, these little notes can serve the same purpose
that commenting your code does.

It's been a long read – so here's [a video from Ryan Holiday]() – one of at least three people who
have made a profession out of helping us find our way through this pro- and con- fusion of books,
the others being [Tom Butler-Bowden who has produced a very useful series of book summaries;]()
and Robert Greene who produces superbly-designed books covering such central topics as War,

Strategy, Seduction, Mastery and Human Nature and whose working methods are nicely described here.

What makes for good non-fiction writing?

This blog has always been interested in "good writing" – by which I mean writing "which makes an impact". And I'm not talking about novels - much as I may have enjoyed characterisation in the stuff I would read in my leisure time at an earlier stage in my life.

I'm referring to the non-fiction world which has been my focus this past decade. Reference to **"writing which makes an impact", of course, just begs further questions** - such as how widely shared is the impact? And what sort of impact? In aggression? In the extent or source of evidence brought to bear? In challenging prevailing opinions?

Clearly, what makes an impact on me as a white, Scottish middle-class male retiree is very different from writing which appeals to young, black, unemployed and American women. But there should surely be some measure of agreement about what constitutes good writing amongst at least university-educated retirees?

I've been concocting one of my famous **tables this last week in an attempt to explore that question. It covers the living and dead, young and old, matters of style and of character.** At the moment it has 35 entries in which **George Orwell** figures as, perhaps, the most important although I have always felt that Arthur Koestler was the more gripping writer. To help me on my task, I'm dipping back into Chris Hitchen's little book from 2002 – "Why Orwell Matters" (Hitchens is naturally on the list!) and have just downloaded Bernard Crick's 1980 biography of George Orwell (written with the support of his widow)

One of the things I'm discovering is how **difficult it is to try to convey the distinctive feature of a writer's "tone of voice".** When I googled this I came across an interesting suggestion that there are four types of writing – expository, descriptive, persuasive and narrative thus –

> **EXPOSITORY**
> Expository writing is one of the most common types of writing. When an author writes in an expository style, all they are trying to do is explain a concept, imparting information from themselves to a wider audience. Expository writing does not include the author's opinions, but focuses on accepted facts about a topic, including statistics or other evidence.
> Examples of Expository Writing
> - Textbooks
> - How-to articles
> - Recipes
> - News stories (not editorials or Op-Eds)
> - Business, technical, or scientific writing
>
> **DESCRIPTIVE**
> When an author writes in a descriptive style, they are painting a picture in words of a person, place, or thing for their audience. The author might employ metaphor or other literary devices in order to describe the author's impressions via their five senses (what they hear, see, smell, taste, or touch). But the author is not trying to convince the audience of anything or explain the scene –

merely describe things as they are.
Examples of Descriptive Writing
- Journal/diary writing
- Descriptions of Nature
- essays

PERSUASIVE
When an author writes in a persuasive style, they are trying to convince the audience of a position or belief. Persuasive writing contains the author's opinions and biases, as well as justifications and reasons given by the author as evidence of the correctness of their position. Any "argumentative" essay you write in school should be in the persuasive style of writing.
Examples of Persuasive Writing
- Op-Eds and Editorial newspaper articles
- Advertisements
- Letters of recommendation

NARRATIVE
When an author writes in a narrative style, they are not just trying to impart information, they are trying to construct and communicate a story, complete with characters, conflict, and settings.
Examples of Narrative Writing
- Oral histories
- Novels/Novellas
- Short Stories
- Anecdotes

Words

I appreciate it's a bit perverse of me to bang on about effective communications when the majority of my readers have English as their second language - particularly when I return fairly often to the subject. It was, for example, just 3 years ago when I commended almost 60 writers for the quality of their writing – although at least a dozen of them were bilingual
But these efforts simply flagged up my preferences – they didn't try to identify the features that gave the writing its impact. And that's what I now want to attempt – building on the comment in the last post that "**impact" has something to do with not only the style but also the character of the writer**. Generally, of course, we are told to separate the two when we are considering creativity - but I think this is impossible

Let's start with character – as I survey the various lists I've made what comes through is the breadth of their curiousity and the independence of their thought – indeed their downright obstinacy. They read voraciously across intellectual (and often national) boundaries – and don't suffer fools gladly.
On style, they generally use short sentences and are constantly on their guard against the clichés and metaphors which so easily take over our minds. We should be in charge of language – not the other way around. George Orwell is the master of this – as his widow put it in her preface to the 2nd volume of "Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters", he was –

one of the most honest and individual writers of this century -- a man who forged a unique literary

manner from the process of thinking aloud, who possessed an unerring gift for going straight to the point, and who elevated political writing to an art.

The very first essay in that second volume is on "New words" which anticipates the [Newspeak](#) his 1984 made famous

When you are asked "Why do you do, or not do, so and so?" you are invariably aware that your real reason will not go into words, even when you have no wish to conceal it; consequently you rationalize your conduct, more or less dishonestly. I don't know whether everyone would admit this, and it is a fact that some people seem unaware of being influenced by their inner life, or even of having any inner life.

For anyone who is not a considerable artist (possibly for them too) the lumpishness of words results in constant falsification…. A writer falsifies himself both intentionally and unintentionally. Intentionally, because the accidental qualities of words constantly tempt and frighten him away from his true meaning. He gets an idea, begins trying to express it, and then, in the frightful mess of words that generally results, a pattern begins to form itself more or less accidentally. It is not by any means the pattern he wants, but it is at any rate not vulgar or disagreeable; it is "good art". He takes it, because "good art" is a more or less mysterious gift from heaven, and it seems a pity to waste it when it presents itself. Is not anyone with any degree of mental honesty conscious of telling lies all day long, both in talking and writing, simply because lies will fall into artistic shape when truth will not?
In practice everyone recognizes the inadequacy of language -- consider such expressions as "Words fail", "It wasn't what he said, it was the way he said it", etc.)

Yanis Varoufakis has clearly read his "[Politics and the English language](#)" essay from 1946 and I tried recently to [understand why Varoufakis writes so well](#) –

What makes Varoufakis' various books such excellent reading is the sheer originality of his prose – showing a mind at work which is constantly active……rejecting dead phrases, clichés and jargon… helping us see thlngs in a different light….. using narrative and stories to keep the readers' interest alive…He's in total command of the english language - rather than, as so usual, it in control of him….. You don't expect to find good prose in the "Further Reading" section of a book, but just see what Varoufakis does with the task…

Inconclusion

As usual, words (and thoughts) have distracted me from the intention behind this post – namely to try to identify the characteristics of "writing which makes an impact". To demonstrate the difficulty of such an endeavour, let me share with you [60 Words to describe Writing or Speaking Styles](#) …..

articulate – able to express your thoughts, arguments, and ideas clearly and effectively; writing or speech is clear and easy to understand
chatty – a chatty writing style is friendly and informal
circuitous – taking a long time to say what you really mean when you are talking or writing about something
clean – clean language or humour does not offend people, especially because it does not involve sex
conversational – a conversational style of writing or speaking is informal, like a private conversation
crisp – crisp speech or writing is clear and effective
declamatory – expressing feelings or opinions with great force

diffuse – using too many words and not easy to understand

discursive – including information that is not relevant to the main subject

disputatious

economical – an economical way of speaking or writing does not use more words than are necessary

elliptical – suggesting what you mean rather than saying or writing it clearly

eloquent – expressing what you mean using clear and effective language

emphatic – making your meaning very clear because you have very strong feelings about a situation or subject

epigrammatic – expressing something such as a feeling or idea in a short and clever or funny way

epistolary – relating to the writing of letters

euphemistic – euphemistic expressions are used for talking about unpleasant or embarrassing subjects without mentioning the things themselves

flowery – flowery language or writing uses many complicated words that are intended to make it more attractive

fluent – expressing yourself in a clear and confident way, without seeming to make an effort

formal – correct or conservative in style, and suitable for official or serious situations or occasions

gossipy – a gossipy letter is lively and full of news about the writer of the letter and about other people

grandiloquent – expressed in extremely formal language in order to impress people, and often sounding silly because of this

idiomatic – expressing things in a way that sounds natural

inarticulate – not able to express clearly what you want to say; not spoken or pronounced clearly

incoherent – unable to express yourself clearly

informal – used about language or behaviour that is suitable for using with friends but not in formal situations

journalistic – similar in style to journalism

learned – a learned piece of writing shows great knowledge about a subject, especially an academic subject

literary – involving books or the activity of writing, reading, or studying books; relating to the kind of words that are used only in stories or poems, and not in normal writing or speech

lyric – using words to express feelings in the way that a song would

lyrical – having the qualities of music

ornate – using unusual words and complicated sentences

orotund – containing extremely formal and complicated language intended to impress people

parenthetical – not directly connected with what you are saying or writing

pejorative – a pejorative word, phrase etc expresses criticism or a bad opinion of someone or something

picturesque – picturesque language is unusual and interesting

pithy – a pithy statement or piece of writing is short and very effective

poetic – expressing ideas in a very sensitive way and with great beauty or imagination

polemical – using or supported by strong arguments

ponderous – ponderous writing or speech is serious and boring

portentous – trying to seem very serious and important, in order to impress people

prolix – using too many words and therefore boring

punchy – a punchy piece of writing such as a speech, report, or slogan is one that has a strong effect because it uses clear simple language and not many words

rambling – a rambling speech or piece of writing is long and confusing

readable – writing that is readable is clear and able to be read

rhetorical – relating to a style of speaking or writing that is effective or intended to influence people; written or spoken in a way that is impressive but is not honest

rhetorically – in a way that expects or wants no answer; using or relating to rhetoric

rough – a rough drawing or piece of writing is not completely finished

roundly– in a strong and clear way

sententious – expressing opinions about right and wrong behaviour in a way that is intended to impress people

sesquipedalian – using a lot of long words that most people do not understand

Shakespearean – using words in the way that is typical of Shakespeare's writing

stylistic – relating to ways of creating effects, especially in language and literature

succinct – expressed in a very short but clear way

turgid – using language in a way that is complicated and difficult to understand

unprintable – used for describing writing or words that you think are offensive

vague – someone who is vague does not clearly or fully explain something

verbose – using more words than necessary, and therefore long and boring

well-turned – a well-turned phrase is one that is expressed well

wordy – using more words than are necessary, especially long or formal words

Against the Current

Creativity is an over-used word these days…..The reality is greater and greater homogeneity.
I have to rack my brains to come up with the names of individuals – including the dead - **whose combination of original insights, language and sensibility makes me feel as if I'm being directly addressed**.
I've just tried to do that exercise – and here's what I came up with….So far
Interesting that most tend to be awkward characters - generally swimming against the current

Name	Nationality	Reason for inclusion
Perry Anderson 1938-	UK/US	The insights his de reading gives of both other countries and previous periods – and the elegance with which they are expressed
Jacques Barzun 1907-2012	French/US	Historian – with special interests in cultural history and history of ideas
Brecht poetry		He may not have been a very laudable character but his political poetry is very powerful
Peter Drucker 1909-2005	Austro/US	America's first writer on management
JK Galbraith 1908-2006	Canadian/.US	The breadth of his experience in both public service and academia gave him the ability to express home truths in a pithy, amusing and provocative way – much to the discomfort of the powerful
Francis Fukuyama 1952-	US	He writes brilliantly – on a wide range of subjects
Johan Galtung 1930-	Norwegian	Initially a sociologist but has made major contributions to other social sciences. Occupied the world's first chair in Peace Studies
David Graeber 1961-2020	US/UK	Anthropologist, anarchist and activist – and prolific writer
Charles Handy	Irish/UK	See next 3 posts
Chris Hitchens 1949–2011	UK/US	may lack the humility but compensates with his brilliant oratory and range of reading
Ivan Illich 1926-2002	Austro/South American	A cleric who moved on to work with Paolo Freire and to brilliant critiques of western society
Clive James 1939-2019	Anglo Australian	A hugely underrated essayist and aphorist
Paul Johnson 1928-	English	is an extraordinarily cultured and highly independent English historian whose book on "Intellectuals" did him no favours. "Modern Times" OK
Arthur Koestler 1905-1983	Hungarian/UK	Spanned journalism, literary and scientific work
Deirdre McCloskey 1942-	US	may be too much the American centrist - but is both highly original and a fantastically clear writer
Pankaj Mishra 1969-	Indian	A bit of an autodidact essayist
Edgar Morin 1921-	French	a real original – a prolific writer who breaks disciplinary boundaries and speaks frankly even about the most personal matters for which French academics take him to task. This is a superbly crafted profile

A post last year gave a list of "outsiders" who wrote well viz clearly

A Salute to an exemplary man

Charles Handy has been one of the few writers who has really touched and inspired me on my journey of the past 40 odd years. The first book of his I became aware of was "Understanding Organisations" (1976) - written after 5 years' experience of helping establish the country's first business school and was indeed one of the few books on management available in Britain at the time. When the huge new Strathclyde Region set up a small group to review its departmental structure, the Chief Executive gave us a Peter Drucker paperback to give u.s ideas – it was the only paperback on the subject available….

Handy's "Understanding Organisations" came a year later and was written for the practising executive – management "students" didn't exist then! Unlike the humility and moral power in Handy's writing, technical smartness and artifice are the basic features of most management books.

His next book - "Gods of Management" (1978) was a shorter one which told the story of the 4 types of organisational culture. It was a superb read and was reflected in presentations I subsequently did in Central Asia in the early 2000s to help officials set the "one-man management" principle they were familiar with against alternative systems….

I have just been rereading his little autobiography - Myself – and other more important matters Which is so delightful and thought-provoking and has such a superb review here by someone who knew him that I thought I would reproduce it in its entirety

If we have any British management gurus, Charles Handy must head the list, although he doesn't really like being called a guru. This book is the nearest we shall get to his autobiography, including, as it does, much of his understanding of key management issues. He describes himself as a social philosopher, weighing up the social implications of management and employment matters. We also meet him in this book as a humble person, who, while knowing that he has something to offer, doesn't "think of himself more highly than he should".
As well as many insights into a life well lived, there is much food for thought here about life/work balance, about career paths which emerge rather than get chosen, about how experience teaches us, about the purpose of a business, about the way in which our identity is shaped and success is defined.

Career philosophy
Charles Handy traces his career from early life in an Irish Anglican vicarage, to classical scholar at Cambridge, to Shell executive struggling in the jungles of Borneo, to business school professor, to public figure and broadcaster, traveller and world circuit lecturer. But as in most careers there is a great deal of the unplanned and unexpected in it. We also meet some of the non-public Charles Handy and see him wrestling with personal dilemmas and the implications that we all have different personae, depending on the circumstances of time and place. What is identity? Do we remain the same person throughout our lives? For example, was he the same person at work as the one his family knew at home?

One of the problems of being a manager is that you may be required to try to change what a person really is to what the company or institution wants. For this reason Handy inclines to the view that we should not mix friendship and work zones. Also personality tests, while not devoid of meaning, should be treated with some reserve, because we do change through life and we are usually a mix depending on situations which arise. As he reflects on his experiences, Handy sees that his genetic inheritance did not determine his actions and that if you care passionately about something you discover elements within yourself which you didn't realise were there and which get filled out under the pressure of experience. The influence of his wife, Elizabeth, herself a professional photographer, is credited with making him more of a "connector" and "salesperson" than he would otherwise have been.

One could say that Handy believes that success does not come from knowing where you want to go. Rather by action, experimentation, questioning and re-acting we discover who and what we are. This might help us to a sense of reality when we read these "how to" books that give a clear guide on how to plan and implement your career. He doubts whether even now he really knows who he is; he quotes T.S.Eliot "The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time."

Early development

Charles Handy looks at the various stages of his life in terms of their relevance to making him what he became and, indeed, what he is. He grew up in an Irish society where there was little social mixing between Catholics and Protestants, though there was little overt hostility in his early experience. His family, whose forebears had lived in Ireland for 300 years, was part of the Anglo-Irish community which has now largely vanished from the Republic of Ireland. Regardless of the religious divide, and in spite of an upbringing which deeply respected the British monarchy, he never ceased to feel Irish; after 40 years in England, Handy does not really know whether he is English or Irish in his inner self, though temperamentally, he says, he lacks the Irish gregariousness.

Ireland as the fourth richest country in the world by per capita income has moved on, economically and culturally since he left, but he regrets that many aspects of life which had an Irish charm have diminished. He muses on the mixed blessing which globalisation brings and wonders whether the seductions of consumerism and the pulling apart of old communities have been for the best. He speaks of a seminar he and his wife ran in Dublin where participants expressed regret that good features, like the friendliness, the sense of timelessness, the easy-going life with the family as the centre, had gone, as well as the factors that were not so good like extremes of poverty, false religiosity and island mentality. In all this, Handy is looking back from where he is now; not at what he would have perceived as he was growing up.

So also in relation to his education; he went to Oxford as a classicist, having attained good pre-university Latin and Greek, by a series of fortuitous circumstances rather than by design. Frequently he refers back to his university experience as he sees its effect on his career. He quickly realised that he was being exposed to a different form of education from anything he had previously met. In his first week, his tutor asked him to prepare an essay on "What is Truth?" – this initiated him into a different intellectual world.

Languages per se did not attract him, but they opened the doors to the study of the great philosophers such as Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. He was learning to think rigorously and rationally. Plato left him with the awareness that so much of what we think of as reality is but our perception of reality. In later years he found this a valuable understanding in the teaching of management. (Perhaps this is why business schools like Dartmouth and Aspen have included in their programmes a course for managers and their spouses on the great thinkers of all ages.) Handy learnt that the world was not a simple place; he became a habitual sceptic or at least a thoughtful person.

The Greek philosophers anticipated many of our current problems; Socrates probed underlying assumptions. Handy finds that using a series of "Why? questions" often gets to the heart of a matter. Aristotle's Golden Mean – not too much or too little of anything – has influenced his choices in life, which have not been to be as rich as possible. Aristotle had a lot to say about eudaimonia, a Greek word, often translated as happiness, but which really means doing your best with what you are best at, which, with its ethical undertone, is more profound than "optimising your core competences".

Handy muses on his time at university, that education is not passing on to the new generation what has worked in the past; it is not a matter of merely memorising the great minds of the past and regurgitating the results at exam time. He learnt the value of talking in learning, quoting an Irish saying, "How do I know what I think until I hear what I say?" He looks back on university as a time of learning to think cogently and coherently and applying the reasoning to all aspects of life. "The proof of the educational pudding is in much later life."

Handy's early business career

He wanted to see the world and have a wide range of experience and got a job with Shell whose interviewer told him "You have a well trained, but empty mind; we'll fill it with useful knowledge". There followed two 3-year tours of duty as an executive in South East Asia, beginning as an economist in Singapore, where he got himself started by reading a little book Teach Yourself Economics. Quite soon he was subjected to development by immersion – "throw them in and they will have to learn to swim". His main activity was in Borneo, devoid of roads and Western amenities, where travel was mainly by alligator infested rivers and where he had just one expatriate assistant to help him administer a vast area of oil activity.

It was no good merely working by the manuals. You learnt as you went along, especially by mistakes. It was obvious that "warehoused learning" wasn't going to be of much use. Getting the right people was the most significant road to success. He was not really happy with the Borneo experience; it did not give him the outlet for his personality that he needed. There was scope for making mistakes from which you could learn if you were honest in your subsequent reflection; this remained valuable for the rest of his life. But a career with a big multinational was not for him.

He came back to London where he was given a non-job, which taught him that to be under-loaded can be more destructive than over-loaded. He had no positive responsibility, but plenty of negative responsibility. He could stop things happening, and from this he learned to understand why people lacking positive responsibility could be obstructive, such as the official who refuses a planning application without reason, or the airline employee who closes the gate just as you are rushing up, the waiter who ignores you and so on. For some, it is the only way they can create meaning in what they do.

Handy was then transferred to the Shell Management Training College and felt he had found his vocation in preparing managers for their next assignments. But in a short time he was required to leave that and prepare to go to Liberia. So he sat down and wrote his letter of resignation, not knowing what would happen and after only a year or so of married life. Elizabeth, his wife, receives frequent mention in the book. They have been real partners who complemented each other. Her drive and skill as a connector with people has been a major contribution to his own success.

The turning point
Behind the scenes, someone who had been observing him in Shell initiated a situation as a result of which in 1965 he was offered a post at the new London Business School, which led to a full professorship, without all the normal procedures. He became responsible for the Sloan Management Programme in collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in the development of which he spent a year in the USA and found himself enlivened by the flexibility and energy he experienced there – an attitude that the future is ours to create and that initiative should be encouraged, that anything is possible if you care enough.

The move to London Business School was the turning point in his life which ultimately led to the Charles Handy we know. He comments on the way in which people can influence your path in life and reflects on the opportunity that the work he was then embarking on gave scope to influence others. He talks, from the receiving end, of the chance remark which can have momentous consequences, helping people to believe in themselves. In contrast, he recalls cases where some managers seemed to think that if they were not actively and negatively criticising people that should be enough to indicate satisfaction with performance. He advocates the sowing of seeds in the right quarters which can create opportunity for people to progress; also seeds can be sown in their own minds which can lead to personal development and seeing the right openings.

Whilst he enjoyed and valued his year at MIT, he subsequently realised that, in one sense, he had no real need to have gone. Most of the value of his learning experience lay in the fact that what he knew intuitively and implicitly became explicit and useable. (I found myself very responsive to Handy's thought here. When teaching I often say to the participants that I will not tell them anything they don't already know – only they don't know they know it.)

At MIT and in his work at London Business School, Charles Handy learnt to see management as a practical art, rather than as an applied science. It requires ingenuity, imagination and character. Beyond analytical skill it requires insight; concepts emerge from experience rather then preceding it. He humorously suggests that the MBA programme ought often to be called "Master of Business Analysis", for this is what the daily working on case studies at many business schools leads to.

Like Henry Mintzberg, Handy emphasises that learning about management should take place in tandem with practical experience – a kind of apprenticeship process.

Consultancy and banking firms tend to value the analytical skills, but if you are a practical manager, you require people skills, perseverance, courage, an ethical stance, self-knowledge – a range of awareness encapsulated nowadays under the term "emotional intelligence". The teaching at London Business School in its early stages was not based on this perception, but Charles Handy tried to introduce ethical awareness by the study of the Greek classic Antigone, where the main character was torn asunder by a clash of loyalties. After a trial run he had to drop it.

This concern to emphasise practical management led in 1981 to his involvement in the Open University programme The Effective Manager. He wrote much of the home study text and was able to marry classroom material to the realities

which the students would be facing in their daily work life. They were earning while learning. The programme developed into the Open University MBA programme which now has some 3000 students, more than any other business school in Europe. (Perhaps I might be allowed a comment that the Ashridge MBA programmes and its consultancy services share the Handy philosophy and even earned a pat on the back from Mintzberg.)

This experience of business school teaching in 1987 led to Charles Handy's role as chairing the production of the report The Making of Managers, in which he proposed a two-part MBA programme, the first, in the classroom on the language of management, and the second, part-time and related to current experience and involving mentors from the participants' organisations. It did not catch on immediately, but its influence is perhaps seen in the later proliferation of part time programmes for working executives.

A new direction

We have jumped ahead and have to return to a sad, yet transforming experience in Charles' life. His father, a 74 year old retired vicar in the Church of Ireland (Anglican), died unexpectedly. People from all over Ireland flocked to the funeral, a testimony to a quiet but deeply concerned life to which many owed much. Handy saw into the depths of purpose and meaning in life and resolved to do something more meaningful than climbing career ladders.

He consulted two bishops as to his prospects of entering the priesthood. They felt the rough and tumble of parish life would not suit him, even if he might make a good bishop ultimately. However they knew that there was a vacancy coming up as warden of St George's House, Windsor Castle. This is a "college" within the grounds of the castle, just by the beautiful St George's Chapel, where some surplus accommodation was taken over to enable training courses for the clergy to be run and where, also, especially at weekends, what were called "consultations" took place.

The consultations gathered together people from all walks of life, who might have a contribution to make to working through the social dilemmas of our time. (I was privileged to attend a number of them under the wardenship of Charles Handy's successors. They are unforgettable, mind-stretching occasions in unique surroundings. The ideas shared are usually summarised to contribute to the literature of the particular theme.) Out of these consultations grew the writing of Charles Handy on the Future of Work. The little summary of the consultations on that theme is still the best piece of writing on the topic, which he has developed further in works like The Age of Unreason and The Empty Raincoat.

Particularly he has popularised the idea of a portfolio life. The four components of the portfolio life are "paid work" (fee or waged work), "gift work" (voluntary), "study work" and "home work". These may operate simultaneously. An associated concept is that at different stages of life one may be a core employee of a company, a contracted specialist, a part time worker or freelance. No longer is work a matter of a lifetime of 40 years or more with one firm. Rather there is the freedom to move through a variety of work experiences without having to be subject to the lifelong discipline of being a fulltime employee. And with this approach is the opportunity to go on sharing, even into old age, any wisdom one has acquired.

In taking on the work at St George's, Handy dropped his salary considerably and had to watch the pennies, yet felt that in other ways he was enriched and a wider world was opened to him by which he has been led into paths he could never have sat down and planned. He was uplifted by the spiritual elements of the experience of being associated with the royal chapel, with its contrasts between the pomp of human prowess and the humility of service. He is what he calls a cultural Christian; not strong on the formal doctrines, though powerfully affected by the underlying significance of the Biblical stories, finding in the spiritual experience of St George's a peace and sense of values which will always be with him and which is reflected in the regular talks he has given for the BBC on the Thought for the Day programme. (Some of these are gathered together in a little book Thoughts for the Day.)

The search for deeper meaning which was prompted by his father's death took a step forward when he felt he ought to apply the principles of the portfolio life to himself. So when his stint at Windsor ended he did not seek formal employment but decided to become a freelance, no longer imprisoned by organisational life, but ready to follow the path as it emerged.

Living the portfolio life

There was considerable risk involved in going freelance. He was a successful author, though not all his works sold well, and now there would be no monthly cheque coming in. With the full support of his wife, the next phase of life's adventure started for him and them. We have already referred to some of his activities in the early part of his new life – with the Open University and "The Making of Managers". But for the first few years there was also some

anxiety about whether the income would be there to pay the bills. Activities like being the chair of the Royal Society of Arts would not have sufficed, though they were good for his image. (A thought he would not have welcomed, feeling uneasy about self promotion; his wife became his agent eventually and she had fewer inhibitions about ensuring that some of his value was recognised in a practical way.)

However, had he allowed the risks to dominate his thinking he would have been the poorer and so would all of us who have been influenced by his writings. But one is glad that he shares in this book the difficulties of ensuring a roof over their heads, ensuring that cash was coming in and taking care of the education of two teenage children. He did a lot of lecturing. Indeed it was in this period this author first met him at Ashridge and saw for ourselves the humility of a man whose fame was spreading. He discovered during this period that if you "care deeply about what you are doing, then nothing else matters too much".

In time, he and his wife achieved a good measure of professional stability. How they have organised their portfolio lives makes fascinating reading. He undertook world lecture tours on which she joined him, and they rationed them to enable them to gain pleasure and experience from them, which was of greater value to life than accepting all the offers he received and the money that would have gone with them. They also planned how many days they would work on their two professions and on how many they could enjoy their freedom, with an allocation for voluntary work. They worked separately, yet with a deep interest in what the other was doing. He also became an accomplished cook.

Their experiences of living within their means, particularly in the early days of the freelance phase, also caused him to reflect upon how the consumer society is not satisfied with enough, but is always seeking more and more. It is said that the goods on offer add to your power of choice. But what is the value of such a bewildering range of choices in the absence of a criterion of choice? They simply add stress. Handy refers to Adam Smith's view that while economic growth was obviously a good thing, making life easier for everyone, too much of it for too long would result in a surfeit of unnecessary things. But Handy, as a social philosopher, also asks whether we have the right to determine for others what is necessary and what merely clutters up the streets with discarded packaging. He also recognises that all these luxuries create work for others. So he gets us questioning rather than providing unambiguous answers.

Thoughts on capitalism

His experiences linked with his social philosopher role led him into some thoughts on capitalism (more fully dealt with in his book The Hungry Spirit). At one stage by a variety of circumstances he and his wife found themselves the owners of three homes, which made him feel guilty. He felt that the business culture may have become distorted. He evinces reservations about the American culture "that argued that the market was king, that the shareholder always had priority, that business was the key engine of progress, and that, as such, its needs should prevail in all policy decisions." He considers that what is called for is to retain the energy of capitalism without its flaws. Shareholders tend not to be owners in the sense of taking a pride in their property; more often they are just investors or even punters. They are there for the money. But if money is the purpose of business activity, it is like living to eat instead of eating to live. "The purpose of a business is not to make a profit, full stop. It is to make a profit in order to enable it to do something more or better. What that something is, becomes the real justification for the existence of the business." He quotes a speech by the head of a large MNC, stressing that all the stakeholders benefit from a profitable business. Handy agrees, so long as the benefits are fairly balanced.

In his concluding remarks Handy looks back over his life experiences and asks questions such as why do we need such big organisations when most of us don't relish working in them. While he approves of the open market, carefully regulated, as a means of making the world a better place, he regrets that the phrase about making the world a better place is often missing from the capitalist narrative. Capitalism too often takes selfishness to be its driving force, where dog eats dog. Yet he believes that there is an altruistic gene in most of us. Why then when reporting their yearly results do companies tend to report the results just for themselves, rather than including the results for the customers or the world at large?

We can let him sum up his social philosophy:

I believe that organisations are, in a broad sense, the servants of society. They exist to provide us with the things and services we need or want. We rely on them to do so efficiently and effectively. Ideally, their interests and ours should coincide, but they will prosper most if they define their purpose as something bigger than themselves.

Charles Handy II

When you get to my age, the urge to look back and take stock is fairly irresistible – what, you ask, has life been for?

David Brooks (in The Road to Character) identified two very different ways we answer that question – what he called "CV and eulogy values" respectively. The latter, the more thoughtful, evoked the values we would like to be remembered for - rather than the more partial CV stance we push at prospective employers….

Few writers have given such a profound set of answers to this question than Charles Handy whose dozen or so books – many with "confessional" aspects - are constantly touching on the issue. The last post focused on a 2007 memoir of his which I had pulled out a few days ago from the great library I have in my Transylvanian mountain house.

Thanks to the Internet Archive website, I'm reading a Handy book I've never before had the chance to explore - **Beyond Certainty – the changing world of organisations**, a collection of essays he produced in the late 1980s containing the germs of "The Age of Unreason" (1989) and "The Empty Raincoat – making sense of the future" (1994)

What exactly is it in Handy's writing which has so captivated me since I first came across his "Understanding Organisations" almost 50 years ago??
- **Is it his blunt honesty?**
- **The elegant and unassuming nature of the uncertainties he expresses?**
- **The accidental nature of the life he describes?**
- **The turning points he so vividly describes?**
- **The clarity and almost spiritual quality of the writing?**

Of course, we are all different in the way we respond to writing – and so much therefore depends on what we grew up on. I'm of the generation raised on the likes of Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley, Reinhold Niebuhr, Arthur Koestler and EH Carr - with authors such as Ernst Schumacher, Robert Fisk, David Korten and even George Orwell appearing somewhat later **Looking now at Handy's life, it suddenly becomes very clear to me that the reason his writing makes such an impact is that he was somehow motivated to change his career every decade or so - and therefore falls into the category of those who have crossed critical boundaries and who, as a result, have this capacity to see the world differently from the rest of us.**

The boundaries I'm referring to may be geographical, intellectual or class – but somehow, when individuals cross them, they find themselves so profoundly challenged that they both make new connections in their thinking and express themselves with such clarity – perhaps because they have become more sensitive to the complexities of language. It's the spark of originality

That's perhaps why he has the rare knack of anticipating the future – somehow he's able to peer into the tea-leaves and help us make sense of the new worlds are emerging and to do so in the most crystal-clear and elegant of language. He did this first in The Future of Work (1984) when he coined the phrase "portfolio work" to describe how our careers in future would be a mixture of time-limited projects and also invented (in "The Age of Unreason" 1989) the phrase

"shamrock organisations" to describe the form the organisations of the future would take – the (small number) of core workers; those on contract; and part-time workers. His books have had an increasingly chatty approach – helped probably by his experience of doing a lot of "Thought for the Day" pieces for the BBC which taught him, he says, to compress his thoughts into 450 words or so. For a very graceful assessment of Handy's role and significance see this article

He's reached the advanced age of 88 – and I was delighted to discover that he produced what may well be his last book 21 Letters on Life and its Challenges which takes the format of short epistles for his grandchildren - summing up what he feels he's learned about life. It's such a delightful read that, for my own benefit, I made a note of the main points of each of the chapters – which you'll find in the hyperlink in the title above.

Chapter Title	Key Points
Things Will Be Different	List of some key words whose meanings have changed dramatically in a lifetime ("chip used to be piece of wood or fried potato") and the scale of change in that period – not least work. We are now "Creatives, Carers or Custodians"
The Human Imperative	But the really big issues and questions don't change. "Trust but verify"
Life's Biggest Question	Emerson's advice – "*To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived, this is to have succeeded*" Doing the best you can with what you're best at
God or What?	In the new diversity, can we tell right from wrong? Aristotle has twelve virtues: 1) Courage – bravery and the willingness to stand up for what you think is right; 2) Temperance – self-control and restraint; 3) Liberality – kindness, charity and generosity; 4) Magnificence – radiance, joie de vivre; 5) Pride – satisfaction in achievement; 6) Honour – respect, reverence, admiration; 7) Good Temper – equanimity, level-headedness; 8) Friendliness – conviviality and sociability; 9) Truthfulness – straightforwardness, frankness and candour; 10) Wit – sense of humour; 11) Friendship – camaraderie and companionship; 12) Justice – impartiality and fairness
Everyone Can Be Wrong	Closed and open answers; Galileo and Copernicus; Handy's portfolio/clover idea – and the initial reaction against it
Curiosity Does not Kill the Cat	Travel with curiousity in your backpack
How Clever Are You?	Different ideas on the subject (Howard Gardiner). Schools have a strange notion "I keep six honest serving-men (They taught me all I knew); Their names are What and Why and When And How and Where and Who" (Kipling).
Life Is a Marathon not a Horse Race	Defects of competition; Be your own master
Who You Are Matters more than	His wife photographs subjects with 5 objects to illustrate their different identities.

What You Do	Idea of "street wisdom"
Keep It Small	Edmund Burke's "small platoons" Robin Dunbar's organisations of no more than 150 and key groups of 5, 15 and 45. Federal systems best
You Are not a Human Resource	Pity Drucker used the management word – "work should be organised; things managed and people led"
You and Society	Complicated letter – suggesting we have excessive regulations; that rep democracy should be upheld
Life's Changing Curves	We should start afresh before we are forced to
Enough Is as Good as a Feast	The Bushmen had a 15 hour week – then money poisoned everything (Rousseau) Handy separate NEEDS from WANTS (concept of free work)
It's the Economy, Stupid	His father's "stipend"; His wife' separation of "investment" from "consumption" "Money and fulfilment are uneasy bedfellows"
'We' Beats 'I' all the Time	If there is a common purpose; Never take friendship for granted
When Two Become One	He confesses to selfishness in how he treated his wife
What You Can't Count Matters More Than What You Can	"McNamara fallacy" means that much of life gets pushed into 3rd or 4th place.. eg love, hope, kindness, courage, honesty and loyalty
The Last Quarter	future generations can look forward to last 25 years of their life being free of financial worried
You Are Unique	We have 3-5 identities
My Last Words	What he recommends for his grandchildren - Learn a foreign language, a musical instrument, a sport (individual better); write a diary and fall in love

Some Videos; There are all too few videos of the man. But this is one which starts with an appreciation of Peter Drucker and then makes some great points including the importance of listening to what people say – not least oneself!

And then a more recent one whose sub-titles valiantly try but completely fail to catch what his faint Irish brogue is actually saying.

The Hungry Spirit in Context

I've just been rereading Charles Handy's The Hungry Spirit – beyond capitalism, a quest for purpose in the modern world – which took some courage to publish in 1997.

This, after all, was Britain's top management thinker (if not guru) daring to **suggest that there was something morally questionable about the economic system - which was then in triumphalist mood** after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent implosion of the Soviet Empire 2 years later.

It's true that the World Bank, for example, had started, with its World Development Report of that same year, to row back the strong anti-State stance it had taken just a few years earlier.

And Handy had impeccable credentials – he had worked for almost two decades years for the oil giant BP. And then moved to help set up the UK's first School of Management – to prepare for which he took a year out to follow the Master's programme at the prestigious Sloane School of Management at MIT in the US. Even during this time, he was starting to notice some problems in management practice which were brilliantly dissected in a later book by two highly experienced

US managers called "[The Puritan Gift]"

I thought it would be useful to try to situate "The Hungry Spirit in the wider context of "best-sellers" of the period. Was its dissenting tone noticed? **How did it compare with other management writers such as Stephen Covey and Robert Quinn who also had strong ethical concerns?** Interestingly, the very next year Handy was one of the lead contributors in [Rethinking the Future] ed Rowan Gibson (1998) which included chapters from such leaders of management thought as Warren Bennis, Stephen Covey, John Naisbitt, Peter Senge and Lester Thurow – the last of whom had indeed just published "[The Future of Capitalism]"

At the end of the day, I have to wonder, **what impact did such writing actually have? Most of us – after the scandalous immorality of the 2001 Enron scandal followed by the global financial meltdown of 2008 – have become deeply sceptical of the possibilities of reform from within**

I was impressed with what I picked up from my reread of **"The Hungry Spirit"** – particularly with Handy's ability to put complex notions into simple words; and to integrate important ideas naturally into the flow of the text. The book has three sections – the **first ("Creaking Capitalism")** deals with the limits of markets; when efficiency is ineffective; and what its good at. The **Second section focuses on the individual** ("A Life of our Own"), starting with an analysis of "the age of personal sovereignty" and what he calls "proper selfishness", exploring the search for meaning and ending with the argument that "I needs to be "we" to be "I"!.

The final section ("The Search for a Decent Society") echoes those – like David Korten, Paul Hirst, Will Hutton, John Kay, Paul et al But how much effect Handy's **writing and exhortation had is another question.**

2.   Is there a future for liberal democracy?

Several things have combined to get me posting often this year about the quality of government – with the pandemic being a major one in exposing the **very different capacities of state and government** in different parts of the world

Of course, it doesn't take much to get me going on this issue – my dissatisfaction with the combination of politics and bureaucracy goes back fully 50 years to my initial experience as an elected member with a local municipality; subsequent successes in making a large Regional authority more open and democratic; and experience since 1990 as a consultant in "capacity development" in ex-communist countries.

In Defence of Politics by Bernard Crick was a 1962 book which changed my life. Its argument that politics was an important and honourable activity was undoubtedly a major reason for my becoming in 1968 a local politician; occupying a senior, reforming position in the West of Scotland for some 20 years; on the basis of which I then became an international consultant. Of course the election in 1964 of a Labour Government – after 13 years of Conservative rule – was another important influence. As was my interest in regional development and politics - and the writings of Labour and leftist intellectuals such as Tony Crosland and John Mackintosh. The latter was a tutor of mine whom I met subsequently in parliament to discuss his take on local government reorganisation and devolution – Crosland the author of the definitive The Future of Socialism (1956) whom I had been honoured to host when he visited local party HQ in my home town…..

Fifty years ago, graduates like me didn't need inviting to get involved in politics – we had role models and change was in the air….The older generation patently needed replacing, we thought, and we were the ones to do it.

How different things are fifty years on!

Cynicism has been at full blast for at least the past decade – with politicians dismissed as self-serving and useless……

Matt Flinder's Defending Politics – why democracy matters in the 21st century was issued to mark the 50th anniversary of that book, suggesting that the new language of "rights" and "consumer choice" conceals deeper forces which have undermined our understanding of the necessarily incremental and collective "give and take" of the political process.

He identifies 8 key factors which have made an impact in the past half century…..listed in the left-hand column. The rest of the table is my attempt to summarise his analysis – always a useful discipline!! I liked the book a lot – not least because it is short and yet is clearly based on a good grasp of extensive literature.

What I particularly liked were the summaries each chapter gave of the argument to be conducted and the way he gathered 5-6 books together at various points to illustrate the various points he was making….

The Basic argument of "Defending Politics"

Changes in Context	Explanation	Results	Line of argument
"Decline of deference"	Greater education, sense of security and of rights	Hypercriticism	Politicians and those concerned with politics need to show courage and realism
"Growth of overload"	State overwhelmed by public expectations	Unrealistic expectations	
"Move from government to "governance"	Privatisation, contracting out has led to more complex organisational structure	Inertia, impasse	Need to assert importance of "the commons" ie collective endeavour
"Growth of globalisation"	Not just economic but legal and informational	Blame can easily be shifted to impersonal forces	??
"Impact of technology"	Move away from door-to-door and personal; aggression on social media	Easy to find scapegoats	Need for cool voices
"Accountability explosion"	Range of agencies monitoring state bodies for performance	Blame culture	More realism
"Ideological blur"	Parties concentrate around the floating voter; journalists focus on trivia	Voters feel voiceless; opening for extremists	
"Flight from reality"	Academics talking to one another rather than the public; media focus on trivia	Opening for extremists	

He is particularly angry about the role journalism has played in the past couple of decades in the demonisation of politics. The recent collapse of Newsweek magazine is just the latest sign of the collapse of editorial standards - and the perversity of the business model based on reader clicks..... Flinders rehearsed the basic argument of the book in his inaugural Professorial lecture in 2010 – which you will find here on Alastair Campbell's blog

A Taste of the Posts on Liberal Democracy's Crisis

Title	Takeaway
James Burnham has the last laugh	The elite have always been concerned about keeping the masses under control The new tension between capitalism and democracy
A New Authoritarianism?	A centrist maps her generation's collapse in to nationalism
Cultural Despair	A great German/US historian explores how liberal democracy collapsed in the 1930s
Democracy in America??	How far it has fallen in 50 years
Bread and Circuses	The Romans knew how to keep the masses happy
Democracy – its skeleton, flesh and blood	What we used to expect from the institutions which made democracy work
Yes, Minister	why the notion of balance is unfashionable
The British Love Affair with reform	does the civil service need misfits? Gove's cunning plan
How do we get a better society?	We need to recognise that Political parties have lost the functions they used to have
People Power	The importance of citizen juries
If everyone has rights, perhaps noone has them?	How cynicism has contributed to the decline in public trust (Heclo)
Purposive Government	why it's so difficult
How to Build State Capacity	What tools are available to countries which really want to give hope back to its citizens? Great bib
Techniques…leaders …or institutions?	We have every reason to be cynical about reform – but some people are actually good at it!
The fall and rise of positive PA	How public admin reform got to be sexy in the 90s – and the lessons its leaned since then
Europe's pillars scorned	"Open Democracy" mercifully summarises 2 important but long Perry Anderson articles
Rule of Law under attack	The lack of a written constitution is making the UK ever more like a banana republic
The Challenge of Rule of Law for the EU	The EU at least has realised that it can no longer take this for granted
Why the Rule of Law is fundamental	A report commissioned by a leftist Irish MEP has exposed the deficiencies
Holding power to account	The shocking story of how American whistle-blowers are treated
Democracy in question	How I tried to make sense of it all at the end of the year

James Burnham has the last laugh

One of the **central issues bothering the elite a century ago was that of how "the masses" might be "controlled" in the "new age of democracy"….W**riters such as Walter Lippmann (Public Opinion 1922) and Ortego y Gasset (Revolt of the Masses 1930) conjured up frightening narratives about the dangers of the great unwashed masses. Lippmann's full book can be read here…

The scintillating prose of Joseph Schumpeter's (1883-1950) Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (1943) was a favourite of mine at University – with his theory of the "circulation of the elites" reassuring the elites of **the post-war period that all would be well**….

Of course the rebellious 60s got them worried – but a combination of the Trilateral Commission's 1975 report on The Crisis of Democracy and, as Perry Anderson has recently and very usefully reminded us, the European Commission soon sorted out the plebs

But the populism evident since the start of the new millennium has sparked new anxieties about the masses amongst the liberal elites – and indeed raised the question anew as to whether capitalism is consistent with democracy…

One guy whose words are worth reading on that question is SM Wolin – whose book on the history of political thought - Politics and Vision - held me spellbound in the 1960s. In his 90s he produced this great critique of the US system – Democracy Inc – managed democracy and the specter of inverted totalitarianism (2008). There's a nice discussion of Wolin on this video.

In 1941 James Burnham produced his famous "The Managerial Revolution" against which George Orwell wrote in 1946 a devastating essay Second thoughts on James Burnham. Orwell clearly had some agreement with Burnham about the oligarchic direction in which political forces were pushing society but faulted Burnham more for his fatalistic assessment of the probability of Nazi success.

Not so well known was Burnham's next book The Machiavellians – defenders of freedom (1943) which examined the work of such theorists as Mosca, Pareto and Sorel (And this is an interesting recent article, Why Elites always Rule which reminds the new generation of the significance of Pareto's work…..)

And also forgotten is a book he produced in 1964 by which time he had turned from the fiery radical and friend of Trotsky to a full-blown liberal Suicide of the West which was the subject of an anniversary conference in 2014.

A New Authoritarianism?

Anne Applebaum is an American journalist with academic aspirations - who won her spurs writing about the excesses of Stalinism in the borderlands which Timothy Snyder describes in Bloodlands (2014). She is a quintessential member of the "Anywhere" tribe – globetrotting between her American, London and Polish bases – and her latest little book The Twilight of Democracy – the seductive lure of authoritarianism (2019) starts, not untypically, with a party in her converted Polish castle to celebrate the new millennium. Many of those present no longer even speak to her because they have become hardened nationalists.

Who is it, she wonders, who has changed? Her or them? The few who are still speaking to her are clear it is her….but she tells a different tale.

I was prepared to dislike it but was won over by the chatty tone it adopts to the very serious issue of the rightward drift of Europe and America over the past quarter of century

Julien Benda was a French writer of the early part of the 20th century who wrote a famous book "The Treason of the Intellectuals" (1927) **chastising right-wing intellectuals for their role in bringing France to its knees**….(Mark Lilla has a good article on the book here).

And Applebaum uses the same device - with caustic vignettes of erstwhile "friends" in all three countries. The basic idea is the one set out by Keynes in his famous quote about

> *"Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back".*

It's a pity she doesn't explore this more systematically and identify clear criteria to identify the key "scribblers" - falling back instead on those who just happened to be in her own and her husband's gilded circle. The result is an entertaining, if risky, endeavour….Indeed, I don't think I;ve seen such a public falling out of the elite since Nobel-prizing-winning Elias Canetti's memoir "Party in the Blitz - the English years years" - with the significant difference that he waited a decade before publishing his posthumous diatribe!

But what a pity Applebaum didn't deliver on the promise of her opening quotation from Fritz Stern's marvellous book on "The Politics of Cultural Despair" (1961)... despite her apt quotations from the likes of **Roger Scruton – whose "England, an Elegy" (2000) is as good an example of cultural despair as you will ever find….**

Nor does she mention Sebastian Haffner whose "Germany – Jekyll and Hyde – an eye-witness account of life in Germany" (and even more his raw posthumous "Defying Hitler") gave a stunning account of how easily ordinary Germans took up the opportunities offered when Jews were suddenly in early 1933 evicted from their flats and jobs

An Australian economist who feels that a third of us have an authoritarian streak gets an early (unattributed) mention. The question of the "authoritarian personality" was of course a major focus of academic interest in the immediate post-war period not only with Hannah Arendt (quoted) but, even more Theodor Adorno - who doesn't get a mention. I came to political sociology in the early 1960s by a Romanian, Zevedei Barbu who had produced in 1956 a book which drew on both social psychology and sociology - Democracy and Dictatorship – **so I'm sorry that Applebaum did not give devote more attention to this notion of the "authoritarian**

appeal".

Her take on it - such as it is - is that the world has become so complex that we crave order. Which begs more questions than it answers. But her judgement of her erstwhile "friends" – that they were driven by frustrated ambition – rings rather truer and might have led to a more systematic discussion (linking up, for example, with Haffner's insights)

But chapter four opens with an important discussion of the dramatic change which has taken place in the last two decades in the dissemination of news. For more on this I suggest people should read "The Power and the Story - the global battle for news and information" (2019) by John Lloyd which looks at how authoritarian states and the market have dealt recently with journalists - starting with chapters on China and Egypt.

One of my tests for a book is to go to the end and look at the **bibliography** and **index**. I trust those authors who refuse to follow the dreadful academic tradition of listing every book they know on a subject - and who have the confidence, instead, to select a small number of books they recommend for the reader's attention. Particularly if they then add a few explanatory notes about each of the books. (this author actually suggests we use the index to check that the chapter headings promised in the book's Contents are actually followed!)
Applebaum's book – unusually for such a writer - has neither a bibliography nor index.

Other reviews of the book
https://quillette.com/2020/08/01/twilight-of-democracy-a-review/ - from John Lloyd no less, the Head of the Reuter's Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford
https://artsfuse.org/207714/book-review-twilight-of-democracy-a-slim-investigation-of-the-clerks/

Cultural Despair?
Fritz Stern was a great historian who came to America in 1938 when his family had to move to escape the Nazis and his first book was The Politics of Cultural Despair – a study in the rise of Germanic ideology (1961) a quotation from which opens Anne Applebaum's recent book about the authoritarian mood which has spread globally in the new millennium.
Curiously, however, she neither defines nor develops Stern's concept of "cultural despair" which – with the pessimism of the past few years – would have expected to have been the subject of intensive dissection. There is a nice tribute here to Fritz Stern on his 70th birthday which places the book in context

> The "Politics of Cultural Despair" charted the genesis and diffusion of the antiliberal, antiurban, anti-Semitic, and anticapitalist animus that lay at the heart of thinking about das Volk, and suggested that it was the penetration of these themes into German culture that made National Socialism plausible to many educated, middle-class Germans.
> Stern's book was not the first to do so. But it did so with far greater subtlety, methodological sophistication, and plausibility than its predecessors. While Stern sought to demonstrate the link between trends in German culture and the rise of National Socialism, he did not mean to suggest that the sort of "cultural despair" he had traced was unique to German culture. Indeed, he insisted that the phenomenon of "cultural despair" was not confined to Germany, and that it had not ended with the defeat of Nazism.

Nor did he claim that the success of Nazism could be explained primarily by the cultural developments he had traced; only that its success could not be understood without taking those cultural developments into account. To put the book into context, it is worth recalling, however briefly, the sorts of treatment that the issue had already received when Stern's book came on the scene.
- Perhaps the most influential work on National Socialism to appear during the decade of the 1950s was Hannah Arendt's "Origins of Totalitarianism", first published in 1951. Among its many peculiarities was its studious refusal to draw any connection between National Socialism and the peculiarities of German culture or German national development.

But, to my knowledge, only Chris Hedges has published a major article on the subject
Could it be that the subject of Western decline has suddenly become of minor importance - compared with that of global extinction?
Or is it simply that the subject is too gloomy to arouse interest? The French gadfly Eric Zemmour certainly doesn't think so – he's just published another outrageous book "French Melancholy" whose opening pages actually claim that France IS Europe!

I am therefore a bit diffident about imposing a post on **the subject of declinism** – which gets a good entry in Wikipedia – and will therefore keep it brief
Each of us is unique but, somehow, in collectivities – with a common language – we develop common, distinctive traits…The sense of nationhood came slowly – kings, barons, armies and sailors in the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain acquired (and lost) empires without it apparently giving its present-day descendants a sense of grievance or inferiority…But what Fritz Stern called, in 1961, "**cultural despair**" has deeply affected other countries as they have confronted economic decline.
The UK is, of course, the prime example – with the 1960s in particular being fixated on the issue of the need to modernize and the 1970s on a sense of collapse
Andrew Gamble is a British political scientist who has not only followed closely the debate on economic decline but wrote a famous book about it "Britain in Decline" (1981) which went through four editions before succumbing to a 2000 critique "Rethinking British Decline". Interestingly, one of the authors of this last book, Michael Kenny, went on in 2014 to produce "The Politics of English Nationhood" which anticipated the outcome of the 2016 Brexit Referendum.

It took France another decade before it was afflicted with the same condition - with Eric Zemmour's "La Suicide Francaise" being the first of a cascade of books which have deluged the French in the past few decades – as analysed in Melancholy Politics – loss, Mourning an memory in late modern France (2011)

Is economic decline the first stage of "cultural despair"?
What does it take for a collective sense of despair to reach the point of no return?

Democracy in America?

America is an imaginary place....It exists as an image in each of our minds, nurtured partly by intellectual fare but mainly by the Holywood (and now Netflix) industry. Those of us who have encountered it are therefore often brought up short by something which challenges the myths with which we have been fed – in my case when, in the late 1980s, I had to concede that the country had more democratic energy than my prejudices had given it credit for.

But that was 30 plus years ago – since when **a lot of us have lost that respect for the country's claim to democracy**.
- It's partly that **money has replaced voice in the system** - billions of dollars are sought by those running for public office in the country (with all the favours involved) with a 2010 ruling by the Supreme Court giving an additional boost
- it's partly the **institutional gridlock** that is a feature of a system which divides political power between 2 Houses, a Presidency and a Supreme Court in an increasingly divided and litigious society
- it's partly the turning of political discussion into a gigantic **spectacle and entertainment** industry
- the **narrowness of views** allowed expression on the airwaves
- and the sheer smugness of "a selfish ruling class bringing America to the brink of revolution" - to use the subtitle of Tucker Carlson's 2018 "Ship of Fools" book

That, of course, is just one man's view – well-read perhaps but with values and attitudes which dispose me to be critical. I do expect a society to be open, inclusive and participative.

William Domhoff is an american academic who has made it **his life's work to explore, in books and a website, the question** of **Who Rules America?** The last edition of his running commentary on the question was in 2014 and entitled "Who Rules America – the triumph of the corporate rich". I particularly liked this part of his Intro -

> *The book draws on recent studies by sociologists, political scientists, and experts working for public interest groups and government agencies to update information on corporate interlocks, social clubs, private schools, and other institutions that foster elite social cohesion. It also contains new information on the tax-free charitable foundations, think tanks, and policy-discussion groups through which the corporate rich strive to shape public policy....*
>
> *Although the corporate rich have always found ways in the past to circumvent attempts to limit campaign donations and make them more transparent, the 2010 and 2012 elections took these practices to astronomical levels.*
> *In an effort to make the book more accessible to those with no background in the theoretical debates that animate the social science literature, all discussion of alternative theories are confined to a new last chapter. This approach allows readers to see how the empirically based argument unfolds without any brief critical asides that may be confusing or distracting. This change also may make it possible for readers to better form their own judgments about theoretical controversies because they will have seen the full empirical picture. It also allows readers to skip the final chapter without missing any part of the argument and evidence presented in the first eight chapters.*

I would also point to a doyen of the american political science discipline – Seymour Wolin – whose history of political philosophy "Politics and Vision" has been required reading on courses for some 50 years and who produced, in his nineties, "Democracy Inc – managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism" (2008), one of several books to raise the question since then of the extent to which contemporary capitalism is actually compatible with democracy.

Democracy in America – who cares?

The previous post was my first response to the January 6th storming of the Capitol in Washington USA – which represented the logical culmination not only of four years of Trump rule but of at least 2 decades of onslaught against the democratic system in the country. This started with the "Florida hanging chads" of 2000; continued with sustained gerrymandering and voter restrictions; and culminated in the 2010 Supreme Court decision which allowed corporations unlimited funding of election campaigns.

Such an attack on citizen rights raises **three questions** -
- what sort of debate has this onslaught raised about the state of American democracy?
- Where can we find a coherent agenda for rescuing American democracy?
- with a realistic chance of success?

My googling unearths the following -

1. Only **one such conversation seems to** have been taking place – at the State of American Democracy website supported by the Ford, Germeshausen and Park Foundations, The Heinz Endowments and the Wallace Global Fund viz the great and good. This has led to a book Democracy Unchained – how to rebuild government for the people; ed David Orr et al (2020) which, so far, I've not been able to find to assess

2. There have, over the past decade, been a fair number of critiques of the system – eg Wolin's "Democracy Inc" (2008) and Wendy Brown's "Undoing the Demos" (2015) but I've been able to identify only 3 recent books which set out **strong and coherent agendas for electoral and political change**.
The first by a Stanford University academic associated with the Journal of Democracy who has been monitoring the West's democratisation assistance over the past 30 years (including an abortive effort in Iraq) and has at last turned the analysis back onto the US itself in "Ill Winds – saving democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese ambition and American complacency" by Larry Diamond (2019)
David Daley is an activist and journalist who has just produced "Unrigged – how americans are battling back to save democracy" (2020) And the Harvard Law Review recently produced this book-length analysis of "The Degradation of American Democracy" (Nov 2020)

The elements which need to figure in any serious reform of the contemporary American democratic system are summarised in this table of mine –

Issue	Significance	Options	Constraints
Scale of campaign donations – money buys votes	Massive	- The scale of corporation and Foundation contributions is particularly offensive. - Contributions should be individual and have a ceiling	Will be seen as threat to free speech
Voter restrictions	Huge – many southern (Rep) states have recently disenfranchised significant numbers of black voters For more see this article	- Have proper electoral rolls - remove bureaucracy from registration	Should be straightforward – but Supreme Court would see it as threat to State rights
gerrymandering	Large	More objective system to remaking of electoral boundaries	Highly political
Tone of broadcasting debate	Huge	Bring back Law which required balanced coverage in broadcasting	Will be seen as threat to free speech
Reform electoral college system	many countries have same "first past the post" system		Would require constitutional amendment and would be highly divisive
Restrict filibustering	Minor		
Bring element of PR into Senate elections	Massive – at moment large States (eg California) have same 2 Senators as smallest	Gives Republicans currently a 40 million voter advantage in the Senate	Would require constitutional amendment and would be highly divisive

In short, I get the sense that it has only been the events of January 6th that have finally triggered the realisation of many Americans that their system is so broken it requires a "Truth and Conciliation" approach to reform

- Four Crises of American Democracy – representation, mastery, discipline, anticipation; Alasdair Roberts (2018) does look to be the best of the more detailed analyses of the deficiencies of the contemporary American system. Roberts produced recently the quite excellent "Strategies for Governing"

Bread and Circus - the Playbook of the Corporate Elites

Let me state clearly my position -
- few (if any) societies can **any longer reasonably claim to be democratic**
- we need, very loudly, to be exposing such claims to be the **falsehoods** they are
- a better **vision of democracy** needs to be articulated
- pressure groups should coalesce around the demand for **citizen juries** – initially at a municipal level to demonstrate their benefits
- political parties no longer serve any useful purpose
- we should be insisting that **governments start focusing on the big issues** - which governments currently seem incapable of even attempting to deal with
- using citizen juries
- governments, in other words, **should govern**

The fact that 70% of US Republican party members still cannot accept the validity of Jo Biden's victory in the 2020 Presidential elections certainly indicates not just a very significant shift in the US political mood but a major question about the resilience and legitimacy of that country's basic political system. This may or may not be part of "American exceptionalism" but is certainly very serious.

But the wider **populist backlash against elite rule is part of something much deeper** – and was there for anyone with any sensitivity to see some 20 years ago. **But the elite - and the media which services their interests - noticed something was wrong only when Brexit and Trump triumphed – 5 years ago**. But that was simply the point at which the dam broke – the pressure had been building up for much longer.

If we really want to understand what is going on we have to go much further back – **not just 20 years but probably at least 50 years** – as Anthony Barnett, for one, most recently argued in his extended essay "[Out of the Belly of Hell](#)" (2020)

The demos have been giving the Elites a clear warning – **"your social model sucks". Some** may not like some aspects of what the crowd is saying – for example the border restrictions….but we ignore its message at our peril. So far I don't see a very credible Elite response. Indeed, the response so far reminds me of nothing less than that of **the clever Romans who gave the world Bread and Circuses**. Governments throughout the world have a common way of dealing with a problem – which runs like this –

- Deny the problem
- Rubbish the critics
- Blame the victim
- Marginalise the issue – concede a little by suggesting that the problem was caused by "just a few bad pennies"
- set up an Inquiry
- But ensure (by its composition and direction) that it goes nowhere
- Compartmentalise the responsibility – to confuse
- Sacrifice a few lambs
- Bring on the games and spectacle
- clowns and jesters
- Feed the dogs with scraps
- Starve any programme conceded of serious funds
- Take the credit for any eventual concession that there was indeed a problem

Democracy – its skeleton, flesh and blood

I spent more than 20 years of my life trying to make our systems more democratic and once gave this definition

> "The Government system in a democracy is made up of several structures or systems each of which has a distinctive role. It is this **sharing of responsibilities** – in a context of free and open dialogue – which ideally gives democratic systems their strength – particularly in
> * Producing and testing ideas
> * Checking the abuses of power
> * Ensuring public acceptance (legitimacy) of the political system – and the decisions which come from it".

We used to call such a system "pluralist" – in reference to its multiple sources of power and legitimacy - but, these days, it seems that the public have become impatient with talk and favour instead action. demagogues and strongmen. This is a fundamental perversion of the spirit of democracy….and the focus in the final part of my definition on institutions is meaningless without ideas and discussion….When in Uzbekistan, I put a bit more flesh on the definition

> The key institutions for a democratic system are -
> * A **political executive** - whose members are elected and whose role is to set the policy agenda- that is develop a strategy (and make available the laws and resources) to deal with those issues which it feels need to be addressed.
> * A freely elected **legislative Assembly** – whose role is to ensure (i) that the merits of new legislation and policies of the political Executive are critically and openly assessed; (ii) that the performance of government and civil servants is held to account; and (iii) that, by the way these roles are performed, the public develop confidence in the workings of the political system.
> * An independent **Judiciary** – which ensures that the rule of Law prevails, that is to say that no-one is able to feel above the law.
> * A free **media**; where journalists and people can express their opinions freely and without fear.
> * A professional impartial **Civil Service** – whose members have been appointed and promoted by virtue of their technical ability to ensure (i) that the political Executive receives the most competent policy advice; (ii) that the decisions of the executive (approved as necessary by Parliament) are effectively implemented; and that (iii) public services are well-managed
> * The major institutions of Government - **Ministries, Regional structures and various types of Agencies -** should be structured, staffed and managed in a purposeful manner
> * An independent **system of local self-government** – whose leaders are accountable through direct elections to the local population The staff may or may not have the status of civil servants.
> * An active **civil society** – with a rich structure of voluntary associations – able to establish and operate without restriction. Politicians can ignore the general public for some time but, only for so long! The vitality of civil society – and of the media – creates (and withdraws) the legitimacy of political systems.
> * An independent **university** system – which encourages tolerance and diversity

But such bodies are merely the skeleton of democracy – <u>conversation and discussion is its lifeblood</u> and is built on civility and respect

Take the fundamental issue of **education about which the public has become increasingly vexed** as international league tables have demonstrated national weaknesses in systems which are now seen as crucial for a country's economic success…..**To whom do we – and should we - turn for advice on such things?**
- Politicians – who have the authority to make changes?
- Teachers – who have the responsibility for managing the system of schooling?
- Experts – who study the workings of the system?
- Parents – who have variable degrees of responsibility, activity and expectation?
- Pupils – who have their own expectations and attitudes?

When we ask such a question, **the variability of the answers is quite amazing**. Each country tends to have its own pattern – with the Finnish system regularly quoted as the most successful but outlier country in which highly-trained professionals are trusted to get on with the business. Most people would probably still respond to the question with a reference to the need for collaboration - but **few would trust the politicians**. And yet in most countries, it is the Education Ministry which calls the shots!

Yes, Minister

Not so long ago, I spent almost a decade of my life on "civil service reform" in countries ruled until 1989 by communist parties which brooked no dissent. It wasn't exactly the easiest of tasks to **convince the new breed of politicians that they needed a civil service system which was less subservient** – particularly because the model most of us westerners brought was one where politicians took the decisions - for civil servants to implement.

In reality, of course, the dynamic was somewhat different – with the role of senior civil servants being to bring the more expert institutional wisdom to challenge the generally naïve and over-simplistic ideas of politicians new to office. But, in Britain, first Margaret Thatcher started a politicisation continued by New Labour which has become ever more intense. "Are you one of us?" became Thatcher's catchphrase - and Bliar just assumed that, after 18 years of Tory rule, senior civil servants were untrustworthy.….

I know that many readers' eyes will have glazed over from the very first mention of the phrase "civil service" but bear with me as I quickly cover the background to what is a crucial subject to our days – how we get policies that work

Cronyism was endemic in government until the late 19th century - it was indeed the infamous [charge of the Light Brigade](#) in 1854 during the Crimean War which [created the conditions which led to the creation of the British civil service system](#) which remained intact for more than 100 years.

> *[A Royal Commission on the Civil Service (Northcote-Trevelyan)](#) had been set up in the early 1850s but had been labouring until that military action exposed the disastrous nature of the aristocratic leadership in the country – it was the spark which led to the demands for a more meritocratic approach…..*
> *And the early 1960s saw strong questioning again of British administrative traditions – epitomized in the establishment in 1966 of the Royal (or Fulton) Commission on the Civil Service*

which laid the foundations to a much more managerial approach in the 1970s which became increasingly aggressive in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher.

Richard Chapman's [The Civil Service Commission – a bureau biography 1855-1991](#) (2005) is the best guide to this process – although B Guy Peters' [The Politics of Bureaucracy – an introduction to comparative public administration](#); (1978) was the first comparative and sociological approach to the subject.

Guy Peters returned to the issue very recently in a short article which [explored the effects of the populist mood](#) on the relationship between politicians and civil servants

> *the traditional conception of a stark separation of the competencies and the careers of civil servants and politicians was becoming more a useful myth for both parties, the spread of populism and other forms of "democratic backsliding" have altered these relationships.*
>
> *In the contemporary populist era of governance there tends to be a stark separation between political leaders and their civil servants. The assumption by many, if not most of those political leaders, is that the bureaucrats are members of the "Deep State" that seeks to maintain its own power in the face of the will of "the people".*
>
> *While even when there were conflicts between politicians and bureaucrats in previous decades, they were still "different players on the same team". **However, today politicians and bureaucrats are often on different teams with different goals.***
>
> *The political leaders in some countries, including some in the Visegrád Four countries, have sidelined their civil servants in favor of political appointees and cronies. The same has been true in the United States, Brazil and to a lesser extent in some West European countries. The civil servants may remain in place but are largely ignored by the political leaders.*

But there is an even more insidious force at work

> ***Prime ministers have tended to draw control over government to themselves, even from their ministerial colleagues, demanding greater loyalty from public servants in the process. The same process has affected the individual ministers who also want control over their civil servants, as opposed to "frank and fearless advice".***

So much for the recent efforts of people like Matt Syed ("Rebel Ideas") and Gillian Tett ("The Silo Effect") **to challenge the "groupthink" at the heart of government"**

> *Both the growing power of populist movements and the general increase of political polarization within government and society have been contributing to an increased level of politicization of civil servants and an increased use of patronage.*
>
> ***The concept of a neutral, expert civil service is now less acceptable to political leaders, and a variety of methods are being used to reduce the autonomy and independence of the civil service to ensure the loyalty of civil servants, even in countries with long histories of civil-service independence.***
>
> *The emphasis on political loyalty and adherence to the policy ideas of the government of the day is especially interesting in an era of (presumably) "evidence-based policymaking" (Cairney 2016).*
>
> *The increased availability of evidence about policy both within individual countries and across countries should make the contemporary period one of applying expertise to solve policy problems.*

But expertise has become politicized, and only those experts who support the policy ideas of the incumbent government are likely to have any influence.

And then one for Emanuel Macron –

While individual countries and the world are confronted with a host of wicked problems – notably climate change – the responses from governments may be very tame. Due to the relative lack of expertise available within many civil services, developing forceful and creative solutions will be difficult. This is all the more so given that any real solutions to problems such as climate change will involve upsetting existing patterns of life for "the people" who are the presumed beneficiaries of populist governments.

In Macron's case, of course, the system still had the expertise which he tried to follow – but was outboxed by the gilets jaunes.

UK's Strange Fixation on Reform

I had no sooner posted about the need for **every country to be critically reviewing its systems of government** than the British government came up with proposals for further reform.

It was actually a year ago that the relevant Minister, Michael Gove, first signalled the intention to reform the civil service – but the **disastrous performance of the British government** (as distinct from the civil service) during the Covid pandemic seems to have persuaded them that, at least for presentational reasons, a rather wider review was necessary. The [proposals cover only ten pages](#) (for which parsimony we should be grateful) but seem a bit vague and repetitive to me – with talk of

- transferring officials out of the capital
- recruitment system which bring those with different work experience into the system eg from business, local government, voluntary organs
- more training for both officials and Ministers
- establishing more challenging structures to encourage creative thinking and discourage groupthink
- performance management
- sharper departmental accountability
- greater diversity
- better coordination
- putting data at the heart of government
- better use of scientific evidence

Properly to appreciate what's going on, outsiders need to understand the politics involved. [Michael Gove](#) has been one of the central figures of the Conservative Governments of the past decade – being Minister of Education from 2010-14 when his advisor was the notorious Dominic Cummings who was famously [branded by Prime Minister David Cameron a "career psychopath"](#) for his general nastiness and disruptive style.

Cummings then became the Director of the successful Leave Campaign during the Brexit referendum – with Benedict Cumberbatch appropriately taking the role of Cummings in the film ["Brexit – the Uncivil War"](#) – but then retired to the sidelines to nurse [a rather scholastic](#)

[blog](#) and a business career.

To everyone's amazement, Boris Johnson – having won the Prime Ministership (a contest in which Gove had been a major rival) - plucked Dominic Cummings in August 2019 to be his Principal Advisor.

Within a few months Cummings was talking of the need for "[wierdos and misfits to be at the heart" of the policy-making process](#) – a view for which I have a lot of sympathy – in fact [it's one I've been preaching for some time here](#). But Cummings is just too abrasive a character to last – and was [sacked by Johnson in November last year](#).

But hey presto – his philosophy has now become part of the received wisdom of the British Government. [The Institute of Government](#) is a fairly recent UK Think-Tank (founded 2008) which has established a good reputation for critical appraisal and has [just published its own (short) comment on the government proposals](#) – generally favourable. In what appears a deliberate choreography Cummings had been invited a few weeks earlier to a Parliamentary Select Committee hearing at which [he gave evidence for 7 hours about the serious mistakes made by government](#) Ministers – which also [attracted favourable comment from the Instit](#)ute of Government.

But how come a country famed for its conservatism [seems to love reorganisation and reform so much](#)? The link gives access to a timeline detailing the non-stop changes which have affected British civil servants over the past 50 years – many of which have been globally copied – which is part of Martin Stanley's superb website [Understanding the Civil Service](#)

Is this perhaps what Lampadusa meant when he wrote in the famous "The Leopard" that

> "things will have to change in order to remain the same"?

Non-stop organisational reform is not a good idea. Britain's lack of a Constitution is one of the reasons why British governments are so prone to changing structures.

> "We have a cunning plan" they say –

but, of course, don't stay around long enough to pick up the pieces afterwards!
At least, this time the focus seems to be more about changing "culture" rather than structure. So perhaps some lessons have been learned!

Further Reading/Viewing
[Change for the Better? A Life in Reform](#); (2021) the present version of a draft which presents a distinctive view of the challenge of admin reform in a variety of countries
[Dominic Cummings' Evidence May 2021](#) to UK Parliamentary Select Committee – all 7 hours (Youtube)
[Government Reimagined](#) (Policy Exchange 2021) The latest UK Think-Tank report on the subject
The [UK Civil Service site's](#) background note on the Policy Exchange report

How do we get a better world?

This post wants to explore the fundamental question of why, these days, people – particularly the younger generation – should bother going to the polls?

Politicians have become fair game in the new millennium – but, for those who cared to look, the danger signs were evident a long time ago. In 1977, after almost a decade of helping local community activists and of studying the new literature of community development, I wrote a critical [article about the claim of the British political system to be open and pluralist](#)

> The modern political party was designed to perform the following functions…
> - *recruit* political leaders
> - *represent* community grievances, demands etc.
> - *implement* party programmes - which may or may not be consistent with those community demands.
> - *extend* public insight - by both media coverage of inter-party conflict *and* intraparty dialogue - into the nature of governmental decision-making (such insights can, of course, either defuse or inflame grievances!)
> - *protect* decision-makers from the temptations and uncertainties of decision-making.
>
> Of these five functions, **it performs only the first with any effectiveness**. Community development represents almost the *opposite* of everything that a modern political party stands for - is a critique, that is, not just of certain operational deficiencies of liberal democracy but of its very essence. The modern political party has itself a hierarchical structure and expects others to have the same features. Its members accept this discipline because of their belief in the greater good which, it is assumed, will materialise from the occupation by their leaders of political power and/or the implementation of a particular programme. And modern parties share, to a greater or lesser extent, a belief in the *capability* of modern forms of government. structure (and of industrial organisation) *viz,* that plans and programmes conceived in essentially private processes imposed on society by traditional hierarchical structures will achieve specified aims with negligible negative byproducts.
> **Political parties are about *achievement* - even if that is only the overthrow of their rivals' dogma (or their own!). They are organised to achieve something - be that power or specific changes in policy. Community development, on the other hand, is about a *process*.** Its theory, in a sense, is one of "permanent revolution" which despite its own gentleness and emphasis on trust and sharing, has to live with the uncomfortable recognition that societies based on modern technology -whatever their form of ownership - will subject minorities to more or less subtle forms of repression and exploitation.
> Of the functions listed earlier, those badly performed by local government are the *representative,* the *programmatic* and the *educational:* of these it is perhaps the lack of the educational that is the more serious and where certainly recent community development theory and practice in Britain have performed well

A recent [post charged the political class with treating the public like idiots](#)

 "You have, for the past few decades, made the following assumptions about your fellows –
- **They need to be worked hard - but given bread and circuses**
- **Told what to do and measured by how well they do it**
- **Given a choice at elections only of those who represent an ever-circulating elite**
- **you therefore feel that you no longer need to bother even going through the motions of serving up promises and manifesto programmes**
- **the public is so stupid and so easily distracted that they will believe any of your lies**
- **you can do whatever you want, safe in the knowledge that you have a servile media which knows that its basic task is to keep the public entertained"**

Countries like Bulgaria and Romania came to democracy in the worst of times – when the very

notion of governing was being treated with scorn in the West and "the market" was seen as the answer to everyone's problems.

I vividly remember being invited to speak at a training school for Young Politicians in Romania in the mid 1990s and finding it **infested with young americans zealously teaching their counterparts how to market themselves**. *But they had absolutely nothing to say about the tasks and responsibilities of governing – let alone the moral aspects.*

Why is it that politics is the one activity – at least in the West - which has managed to resist the call for modernization?? In China, the political class is thoroughly trained and individual progress through the layers of municipalities and companies closely monitored….
[A recent book was, hopefully, a small sign that some people at least recognise the need for new skill-sets in government](#).

That is, of course, part of a wider argument which people like [Mariana Mazzucato](#) have been pursuing for a more positive role for government.

People Power

At the moment we cast a vote (or not) every few years - and then blame the government when things go wrong. Patently an absurd way to behave. We should rather choose a pressure group – or even join the relevant political party and get active there… Except that we are just one voice amongst millions….

Lobbyists are paid hundreds of thousands of pounds in retainers to advise companies on how to ensure that legislation reflects their master's interests – so what hope do we, the ordinary citizen, have?

And, indeed, **what right – we might also well ask – do we have to expect to be listened to?** Psychologists have been lining up in the past decade to tell us how irrational we all are!

And that includes government ministers who are notoriously so rushed off their feet as to be unable to focus on the country's long-term interests – even if they wanted to…

At the moment, the **only people who are pressing governments to take a longer - more strategic – view of things** are the [Extinction campaigners](#).

But the idea of "[deliberative democracy" has slowly been emerging](#) – principally via the device of "[Citizen Juries](#)" structured on randomly-selected groups of citizens being presented over several days with a range of evidence which is then discussed as at a jury. The Irish Republic used citizen juries before several significant referenda on social issues in recent years – [with interesting results](#).

Indeed pressure groups should be uniting these days to insist that municipalities (in the first instance) experiment with citizen juries – to help build up a head of steam nationally behind the concept…

It's all very well for academics to talk of the need for governments to develop a more long-term and strategic sense. The Club of Rome is one of the most influential global thinktanks and commissioned the most famous policy advisor of the time, Yeheziekel Dror, to produce a book on the subject - [The capacity to govern](#) (2001). It sank without trace.

But that is perhaps too pessimistic a note on which to end....A few years back - before Brexit and Trump - there was quite a buzz around these ideas of more deliberative democracy and here's one book which nicely summarises that discussion - [Can Democracy be Saved? - participation, deliberation and social movements](); Donatella Della Porter (2013)

If everyone has rights, no one has them

This is the paradox which I am increasingly forced to consider. I started well – protesting at school against the massacre and exploitation of African workers in what was then a British colony; and campaigning against poor housing conditions. These were the late 1950s and 60s – when Penguin books were publishing their great series on "What's Wrong with Britain?" lambasting British institutions as not fit for purpose.

But I [then got stuck on what would, these days, be called class issues]() and was, for example, no great enthusiast for the campaign against "the glass ceiling" - which I saw as an issue for already privileged women….

Slowly, however, a hitherto "deferential" society was changing and asserting itself. The traditional authority of bodies such as the church, state, monarch and elites was challenged – not least with the weapons of [ridicule and satire](). And, oddly, one of the greatest challengers to that traditional respect and authority in the 1980s was no less a figure than the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who launched an astonishing and sustained attack not only on the trade unions but the legal and academic establishments…..Everything needed to change…to be open to scrutiny – with the Freedom of Information (FoI) legislation being enacted in the year 2000

What few of us saw at the time was the effects of this new critical spirit on social cohesion.

Although Robert Putnam gets the credit for making the idea of "social capital" or "trust" a central one in the mid 1990s, it was Francis Fukuyama who, for me, wrote the most interesting book on the subject – namely "[Trust and the creation of prosperity]()" (1995)

A new little industry has become that of **plotting public trust in various profession and institutions**. [The results are worrying]() -

> *Since the mid-1960s, public trust in government and political institutions has been decreasing in all of the advanced industrialized democracies. Although the pattern and the pace of the decrease are dissimilar across countries, the downward trend is ubiquitous. Except for the Netherlands, which actually shows increased trust in the government from the 1970s until the mid-1990s, all of the other advanced industrialized democracies recorded a decline in the level of trust their respective governments have enjoyed. Austrians pointed to the collapse of collectivist consensus as the main culprit of declining trust in government. Canadians blamed the continuing tensions on nationalism and separatism in the country. Germans attributed their malaise to the strains of unification, while the Japanese condemned the consecutive political scandals and the long economic recession of the 1990s. Even the Swedes and the Norwegians, generally associated with high degree of trust in politics, became distrustful of their political institutions in the 1990s….*

Open and critical inquiry is the mark of a civilized nation…...is it not? Who can possibly gainsay that?

It's surely only old fuddy-duddies who could argue otherwise? People like David Brooks – whose book "The Road to Character" I looked at not so long ago – just after I had been deeply impressed by another small book called On Thinking Institutionally by Hugh Heclo (2008) Pages 18-20 of Heclo's book is a timeline which explains the development of political distrust in the USA

> In the last 60 years our education system has designated institutions as, at best, annoying encumbrances and, at worst, oppressive tools of the past. Students are taught to believe what they like and express themselves as they see fit.

> Even people understood to be conservatives—at least in the way we conceptualize political ideology today—assail institutions. Free market economics places a premium on self-interest and assumes institutions stifle innovation and entrepreneurship.
> But institutions provide reference points in an uncertain world. They tie us to the past and present; furnish personal assistance; and institutionalize trust. They give our lives purpose and, therefore, the kind of self-satisfaction that only the wholesale rejection of them is supposed to provide.

How, then, do we protect and promote them? I must confess that, much as I wanted to understand his arguments, I found it difficult to summarise them clearly. He clearly wants to **move our focus away from the self and towards a recognition of our debts and obligations to others.** To "think institutionally" is to do something much more than provide individuals with incentives to be part of and promote institutions - it rather calls on them to modify their behaviour. **Heclo argues that acting institutionally has three components**.

-        The first, "**profession,**" involves learning and respecting a body of knowledge and aspiring to a particular level of conduct.

-        The second, "**office**," is a sense of duty that compels an individual to accomplish considerably more for the institution than a minimal check-list of tasks enumerated within a kind of job description.

-        Finally, there is "**stewardship**." Here Heclo is getting at the notion of fiduciary responsibility. The individual essentially takes the decisions of past members on trust, acts in the interests of present and future members, and stands accountable for his actions.

I have some sympathy for this line of argument – against "the quick buck"…. instant gratification….. tomorrow's headlines…..we need cultures which respect partnership, timescales for investment and the idea of "stewardship" which Robert Greenleaf tried, unsuccessfully, to cultivate…..The quotation, indeed, which graces the first page of my Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation is from Dwight Eisenhower's last address in 1960

> We . . . must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.

Heclo's book, I concede, is in the tradition of Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott and tended to attract the attention of clerics and university administrators – some of whom produced this interesting symposium
The trouble, however, is that "possessive individualism" has such a grip on us all that these

arguments no longer seem to have any traction. Although I've just noticed that another (rather objectionable) conservative has just published a book which tries to build on Heclo's much-neglected book - "[A Time to Build](#)" Yuval Levin (2020) with an interesting article [on the wider issue here](#).

Purposive Government

Who could possibly <u>disagree</u> with **the idea of governing with a sense of purpose??**

But, as I look back over the past 50 years, I realise that **such a notion has been** – for all but a few years and in all but a few countries – **treated with total incredulity**

France was fairly exceptional, in the post-war period, with its system of national planning – although the UK very briefly toyed with the idea when the 1964 Wilson Government set up the Department of Economic Affairs as a rival to the Treasury.

But such aspirations were quickly stifled – with the Heath government of 1970 reasserting the market approach which was fully developed in the 1980s with the Thatcherite privatization programme.

These forces were so powerful that, during the 1970s, writers on policy analysis seemed near to giving up on the possibility of government systems ever being able to effect coherent change - in the absence of national emergencies. This was reflected in such terms as "government overload" and "disjointed incrementalism": and in the growth of a new literature on the problems of "implementation" which recognised the power of the "street-level" bureaucrats.

Although the New Labour governments of 1997-2010 – particularly its "[modernizing government](#)" programme - used the language of strategy and targets, its ideology was an open continuation of the market-friendly and neoliberal policies of Thatcher

Why "purposive government" is so difficult
- the electoral cycle encourages short-term thinking
- the 24-hour media ensures there is always a crisis for governments to deal with
- programmes and priorities create sticks with which to beat politicians
- politicians need to build and maintain coalitions of support - not give hostages to fortune. They therefore prefer to keep their options open and use vague rhetoric rather than commit themselves to programmes they won't be around to gain benefit from
- The machinery of government consists of a powerful set of "baronies" (Ministries/Departments), each with their own interests
- the permanent civil servants have advantages of status, security, professional networks and time which effectively give them more power than politicians who often simply "present" what they are given.
- a Government is a collection of individually ambitious politicians whose career path has rewarded skills of survival rather than those of achieving specific changes

Even before the pandemic, there were voices [urging governments to snap out of their focus on short-term thinking](#) and face up to the huge challenges facing all societies – be it the ageing of the population, AI or climate change. But it is not just the realities of politics which makes that difficult – it is the domination over the past 30 years of the financial calculus in business decisions with companies nervously checking the swings of share prices….

In theory Covid – and the realisation it has brought of the dangers of pandemics – strengthens the case for more strategic government. A [senior Australian civil servant currently enjoying an academic sabbatical](#) in the US has an interesting reflection on this -

> *An important question is whether there is something about the practice of democracy today or the forces it is subjected to which make it harder for democracies to think strategically. It is possible that the 'professionalisation' of politics has created a cadre of apparatchiks hardened and motivated by political battle rather than policy challenges.[27] Perhaps feeding a rapid news cycle traps government and media alike in a short-term, reactive hamster-wheel that prioritises sensation over substance.[28] The rise of social media seems to have hardened partisan positions in the public, which bleeds into politics — and provides fertile ground for nefarious state and non-state actors to stoke for their own purposes using new technologies.[29] Moreover, perhaps the nature of the challenges that liberal democracies now face — such as climate change, or a China that is savvy about gaining ground without crossing the threshold of Western military responses — are not immediate enough to trigger the compulsion for national defence that usually switches democracies from tactical to strategic.*

> *In the face of such an array of difficulties, it may be tempting for some to reach for a dramatic redesign of democracy as the only way to set the system straight. A better course of action may be to understand how to more routinely trigger democracies' already existing capabilities to think and act strategically. For these triggers to work, they need to offer something to all stakeholders, and demonstrate value through tangible progress and real outcomes toward the risks and opportunities that democracies are facing. They would need to offer elected leaders something to challenge the current incentives that prioritise short-term competition and partisanship. And they would need to show the public something different — to allow them to feel more confident in the ability of their government to meet opportunities and challenges, and more confident that their society is on the right path.*

What is impressive is that the article also recognises the importance of **more direct forms of democracy**

> ***One obstacle to a more strategic and ambitious policy in the United States and Australia is a view that there is little real public appetite for it.*** *Voters may say they want vision and strong action, but if this requires more taxes it is a non-starter. In one Australian survey taken before the last federal election, seven out of ten Australians supported more spending on public services, but only very small percentages in each tax bracket felt that they were not paying enough tax.[35] Few elected leaders want to take on this issue. However, questions like these may not be getting at the issue in the right way. Connecting taxes and revenue with specific choices over what public money buys may yield different results.*
> *On a much smaller scale, the city of Lincoln, Nebraska, experimented with this concept more than a decade ago. When Chris Beutler was elected mayor in 2007, his administration faced circumstances familiar to many democratic governments large and small: not enough revenue to pay for services and a population hostile to the idea of tax increases, reductions in services and generally distrustful of political leaders.[36]*

> *Beutler created an initiative called Taking Charge, which brought the community into the budget process as participants, not just observers. They engaged citizens directly on questions of specific trade-offs, like the costs of different levels of snow removal. This appears to have been an open and transparent conversation about the fiscal challenges the jurisdiction faced, and the available choices of cutting services, raising revenue or doing both. When engaged in this way, citizens supported some surprising outcomes. In one 2011 survey, a staggering 84 per cent were willing to raise property taxes to preserve services.[37] The city found that citizens were willing to cut some 'sacred cows' from the budget when they understood the trade-offs; and — arguably just as important — this process endowed residents with a higher level of confidence in the city government. Not only did Taking Charge give the city's leadership the space to pursue reform, but it also improved the conversation between public and government.*

> *The challenge is how to take a local government model like the experiment in Nebraska and apply it at a national level, where the issues are more complex and the distance between political leaders and citizens is greater.*

Indeed, direct democracy is regarded with suspicion by some experts who see it as a pathway to community division rather than as a unifying tool.38 One low-risk, high-payoff way to make a start at the national level would be to identify a specific inspirational initiative each year, such as in exploration or big science. After an information campaign to inform the public about the initiative and what it would mean for them, voters would decide if they wanted to dedicate extra tax to its realisation.

The Conversation is an excellent site encouraging scholars to contribute concise pieces which has been online for almost 5 years – and has an excellent discussion here on this subject. Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Oxford, argues that our obsession with short-term planning may be a part of human nature – but possibly a surmountable one. Chris Zebrowski, an emergency governance specialist from Loughborough University, contends that our lack of preparedness, far from being natural, is a consequence of contemporary political and economic systems. Per Olsson, sustainability scientist and expert in sustainability transformations from the Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University, reflects on how crisis points can be used to change the future – drawing on examples from the past in order to learn how to be more resilient going into the future.

How to build State Capacity

There is a memorable scene at the end of The Candidate as Robert Redford realises he has won his fight for a Senate seat and says "what the hell am I supposed to do now?".
It's bad enough that Ministers have time only to deal with immediate crises – how therefore can we also expect them to find time to deal with long-term issues? Basically by shuffling them onto someone else... But Tony Blair was ridiculed for appointing the ex-head of the BBC to be his "Blue skies thinker".
At least between 1971 and 1983 the UK had a body called CPRS (Central Policy Review Staff) which not only undertook strategic thinking but was able to publish its reports quite openly. This could – and did – create problems for government and was soon judged not to be necessary by ideologue Margaret Thatcher…..Its spirit needs to be resurrected!
Arguably the EC's technocrats have, in this instance at least, been a positive force – creating for member states strategic guidelines which have been used in a multiplicity of fields to give benchmarks and inspire laggards to action….

So the tools are at hand. Making a positive case for government interventions may not have been easy in the past 40 years but a few people dared to do so – and to keep developing the necessary tools. I thought Henry Mintzberg was the first Canary in the mine, as it were, with his 1996 Harvard Business Review piece on "Managing Government" which argued that we had gone too far in our rejection of the State. But John Bryson and Barbara Crosby had published Leadership for the Common Good – tackling public problems in a shared power world a few years earlier – in 1992 (it can be accessed in full by clicking the title). This was also the year "Discovering Common Ground" by W Weisbord was published - a series of case-studies of localities and companies coming together to explore how they might best respond to the challenges they faced. The history of the "search conference" is nicely summarised here.

Mark Moore famously used his position at Harvard's School of Government to work with senior

Public Servants to develop in 1995 his influential notion of Public Value which influenced those working with British civil servants such as John Stewart and John Benington.

Moore and Bryson can be seen as the inspiration for European academics such as Paul t'Hart, de Jong and Mariana Mazzucato who have, more recently, all emphasised the importance of strategic governing. Other trainers such as Matt Andrews have also managed to make the notion of strategic governing acceptable even in places such as The World Bank.

So, for those leaders who genuinely want to know **how to go about making their governments more strategic**, **here are some texts to consider** – starting with Bryson and Crosby in 1992. I was, frankly, astounded to find there were so many!!

Title	Comment
Leadership for the Common Good – tackling public problems in a shared power world J Bryson and B Crosby (1992)	Exhaustive exploration of the issues involved in any attempt to bring people together to confront major problems they face as a society or group
Creating Public Value; Mark Moore (1995)	What was originally a series of inspiring profiles has morphed into a confusing academic industry which is well assessed in the link in the title
The capacity to govern Y Dror (2001).	A masterclass from someone who advised governments throughout the world
The Art of Public Strategy – mobilising power and knowledge for the common good; Geoff Mulgan (2008)	The ex-Head of the UK Cabinet Office wrote this a few years after he finished his service with Tony Bliar
Future Search – getting the whole system in the room for vision, commitment, action; M Wesibord and S Janoff (2010)	The third edition of a detailed manual – full of examples from around the world
Understanding policy success – rethinking public policy; Alan McConnell (2010)	Most academics focus on how things went wrong. This was a rare book which tried to identify the lessons of success
Agents of Change – strategy and tactics for social innovation ; S Cels, Jorrit de Jong and F Nauta (2012)	A Dutch group inspired by Mark Moore
Recognising Public Value Mark Moore (2013)	An update of his 1995 book
The Entrepreneurial State; Mariana Mazzucato (2013)	The first of a trilogy of books from this Italian-British economist who strongly argues the interventionist case
Dealing with Dysfunction – problem solving in the public sector; Jarrit de Jong (2014)	Not the most inspiring of titles for what is a great read from someone who ran a group entitled "The Kafka Brigade"
How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy ; Michael Barber (2015).	A clearly written and useful book about the approach taken by Tony Bliar's favourite consultant
Creating Public Value in Practice – advancing the common good in a ….noone in charge world J Bryson and Crosby (2015)	The update of their 1992 book
"The 21st Century Manager"; Z van der Wal (2017)	An interesting-looking book written by another Dutch academic and consultant who has spent the past 7 years as a Prof at the University of Singapore
Radical Help – how we can remake the relationship between us and revolutionise the Welfare State Hilary Cottam (2018)	Igrant you that this is more of an antibureaucratic critique but it offers an inspiring example of experimental work
"Great Policy Successes" Paul t'Hart (2019)	presents 15 in-depth case studies of policy successes from around the world - each containing a detailed narrative of the policy processes and whether the policies pursued can be regarded as successful.

[Successful Policy Lessons from Australia and NZ](#); ed J Luentjens, M Mintrom and P t'Hart (2019)	The "[successful public governance" website](#) at Utrecht University is now running a series of case studies "pour encourager les autres"
"[Strategies for Governing - reinventing public administration for a dangerous century](#)" Al Roberts (2019)	Ideal for politicians – not just because it's short (140 pages) but because it covers the central issues so clearly
[The Good Ancestor – a radical prescription for long-term thinking](#); Ronan Krznaric (2020)	I've included this highly original book – even although its focus is the individual – rather than government
"[Mission economy – a moonshot guide to changing capitalism](#)"; Mariana Mazzucato (2021)	Mazzucatto's latest
[Guardians of Public Value – how public organization become and remain institutions](#) (2021) ed A Boi, L Harty and P t'Hart	Another series of case-studies from the Utrecht unit of excellent public organisations and the secrets of their success
[Public Value Management – governance and reform in Britain](#) ; John Connolly et al (2021)	Rather too academic. Exclusive focus on UK – no references to Netherlands eg de Jong

First, a confession….I certainly haven't read them all. Indeed I can claim close familiarity only with Barber, Bryson, Cottam, Moore and Roberts. Each is very different – some being voyeuristic case-studies – others reflecting intense personal experience (Dror and Mulgan) or passionate commitment (Cottam and Mazzucato). But all are worth looking at….

Good techniques…… leaders…… or institutions?

Books about getting public services to run well for the average person are little fun to read – which is a crying shame since the issue is of fundamental importance to almost all citizens. Arguably, it was [Gerald Caiden who first made administrative reform sexy](#) – in the late 1960s Because it's an issue which has been central to my work, as academic, politician and then as consultant, for the past 50 years, I've had to wade through thousands of books and article on the subject since then – most of them academic. A few only have given real pleasure – those written by people such as Chris Hood, Chris Pollitt and B Guy Peters – exposing the nonsenses of the fashion for New Public Management (NPM) which started around 1990.

Most of the writing is spoiled by the appalling academic tic of backing up every statement, in almost every line, with named references (in brackets) linked to long bibliographic lists. And academics have to demonstrate their cleverness – so the articles and books consist of long descriptions of innovations – with results difficult to measure but almost certainly with little real impact…

You might think that the net result of this torrent of negative academic coverage would have discouraged innovators in government – but, hey, **there are reputations and careers to be made out of the change process. And staff turnover is such that the disappointing results which eventually come in can be blamed on others**

Managers first started to make an appearance in government in the 1970s – they were the magicians who was supposed to turn dross into gold. I confess that I was an early enthusiast for "corporate management" which is indeed still alive and well in the continued talk of the managerial silos which are to be slain…..John Stewart of the [INLOGOV institute](#) of the University of

Birmingham was the guru who inspired a whole generation of local senior officials to think more creatively about this and indeed led me, in the mid 1970s, to help set up in Europe's largest Region two new types of structure – area committees and scrutiny groups of middle-level officials and politicians

But was the Department of Government at Harvard University under the leadership of Mark Moore which was beginning to show what it was possible to do at a more local level…His "Creating Public Value" (1995) **celebrated the energy and creativity which good public managers brought to state bodies** at both the national and local levels. By then, however, the formulaic NPM had got its grip and Moore, despite teaming up with a colleague of Stewart's and producing a second book, remained a lone voice – with his **message that people (rather than techniques) made the difference**.

In recent years I've noticed a little ripple of interesting titles about more creative ways of working – such as Frederic Laloux's "Reinventing Organisations" (2014), Jorrit de Jong's (of the Kafka Brigade fame) "Dealing with Dysfunction" (2014), Hilary Cottam's "Radical Help" (2018) culminating in Strategies for Governing (2019) by Alasdair Roberts

But it's only in recent weeks that I've realised that Mark Moore's influence has inspired a few Europeans (particularly from the Netherlands) who have been producing a series of books on good practice in public management – of **both the "heroes" and "institutions" (of integrity)** sort as they are called in the recent Guardians of Public Value – how public organization become and remain institutions (2021) ed A Boi, L Harty and P t'Hart This seems to take inspiration also from Hugh Heclo whose "On Thinking Institutionally" I wrote about some years ago

The Fall and Rise of Positive Public Admin

A half-century ago, nothing seemed more boring than my chosen field of public administration. It was descriptive and drew mainly on public law – with a smattering of politics. But, in the late 1960s, local government and the civil service suddenly became subjects of immense interest. Critiqued for being behind the times and needing "modernisation", they were investigated by prestigious Royal Commissions which, after several years of open inquiry, issued detailed reports declaring in ringing tones that these systems were not fit for purpose and needed radical change….

With the world abuzz with talk of people power, I was elected as a municipal councillor in a shipbuilding town and was soon active in community politics – using my new position to help stir local activists against local officialdom. The spirit of such campaigns is nicely captured in Norman Dennis' People and Planning – the sociology of housing in Sunderland (1970)

The Civil Service was a difficult nut to crack and the changes (which started on Ted Heath's arrival in power in 1970) proved to be a generational process – starting with the introduction of managerial practices from the private sector and, later, more dramatic restructuring.

The reorganisation of **local government**, when it eventually came in 1975, was quite dramatic - with the number of councils in both England and Scotland being literally decimated.

Thatcherism produced in the 1980s not only privatisation but dramatic changes in the structure of British government which, argued leading academics, was being "hollowed out".

Indeed, by 1992, the talk – on both sides of the Atlantic – was of the very reinvention of government.in

This was the stage when a new academic industry of reform got underway - it was Chris Hood who first gave the new wave its designation in 1991 of New Pubic Management (NPM) in what became a classic article A Public Management for all Seasons? - but it was a book called "Reinventing Government" (1992) by a town manager and consultant (Ted Gaebler and David Osbourne) which opened the academic floodgates and led to Vice-President Gore's Commission on Reinvention….A table in the Hood article caught the mood perfectly -

New Public Management (NPM)

No.	Doctrine	Meaning	Typical Justification
1	Hands-on professional management of Public Organisations	Visible management at the top; free to manage	Accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility
2.	Explicit standards and measures of performance	Goals and targets defined and measured as indicators of success	Accountability means clearly stated aims
3.	Greater emphasis on output controls	Resource allocation and rewards linked to performance	Need to stress results rather than procedures
4.	Shift to disaggregation of units	Unbundle public sector into units organised by products with devolved budgets	Make units manageable; split provision and production; use contracts
5.	Greater competition	Move to term contracts and tendering procedures	Rivalry as the key to lower costs and better standards
6	Stress on private sector styles of management practice	Move away from military- style ethic to more flexible hiring, pay rules, etc	Need to apply "proven" private sector management tools
7.	Stress on greater discipline and parsimony	Cut direct costs; raise labour discipline	Need to check resource demands; do more with less

For the next two decades, books and articles rolled from the academic world in increasing numbers about the new fad of "competitive managerialism" – although often with a note of caution… The Fourth Revolution – the global race to reinvent the state by J Micklewait and A Wooldridge (2014) - which I took to task a few years ago seems, ironically, to have been the high-point of that wave……

Since then, the tone has changed – thanks largely, it seems, to Mark Moore the emphasis has turned to examples of what successful public managers and institutions are achieving. The Successful Public Governance website based in Utrecht is an excellent example….

I've listed in the full post which you can access here (in ascending chronological order) the other books which have come to my attention recently – which seem to demonstrate the new tone

Europe's Pillars scorned

I'm delighted that someone (on Open Democracy) has seen fit [to try to summarise Perry Anderson's important articles](#) about the institutions of the European Union. The three essays appeared in the London Review of Books in January and total some 50,000 words – see [here](#) and [here](#). They may now have some restrictions on their viewing but there is an even shorter summary [here by the historian Robert Tombs](#)

Perry Anderson's essay 'Ever Closer Union?' explores the significance of the different institutions within the European Union. Their common principle, he finds, is that they minimise democracy, with the leaders of the most powerful states directing the affairs of the union from within an impregnable fortress of rules.

Anderson starts with the **European Court of Justice**, established in 1952 as part of the European Coal and Steel Community, which evolved into the European Economic Community and eventually the EU - noting that the first president of the court was an Italian fascist, the first German judge a "devoted" Nazi, one of the first advocate-generals another German who was heavily involved in running occupied France during the war, and the other advocate-general a Vichy functionary, "in charge of co-ordinating the first wave of persecution of French Jews".

Not all appointments to the court were fascists, but they "were nearly all political" – few had any legal qualifications.

The second set of appointments continued this pattern: a politician from Germany's centre-Right Christian Democratic Union, the son of a leading Dutch politician, the brother of the Italian finance minister (and a former aide to the fascist minister of justice), a one-time Nazi, now Social Democrat, from Germany, an Italian who had helped administer occupied Rhodes in the war, a French appointee who had served the military governor of Algeria and a leading light of the French MRP, another Christian-Democrat party (who at least had a law qualification and had served as a minister of justice).

This latter, Robert Lecourt, "was an ardent federalist" who had been a member of the Action Committee for a United States of Europe, founded in 1955 by the influential European unionist Jean Monnet. It was Lecourt who "wrote [a] historic verdict overturning a national law" in a landmark case that a small Dutch company brought against the Dutch government.

The next year, Lecourt issued the judgment in another landmark case, brought by two Italian lawyers against their own government. With these two rulings, "the cornerstone of European justice was laid". After Lecourt became president of the court in 1967, he was joined as a judge by Pierre Pescatore, brother-in-law of the Luxembourg prime minister, who was "a more outspoken and prolific champion of federalism even than Lecourt", with "one bold judgment after another sealing the court's authority over successive aspects of the life of the Community".

In Pescatore's view, it was the spirit of the Treaty of Rome – the 1957 treaty that established the European Economic Community – rather than "a merely literal reading", which must prevail. The court's initiatives were "celebrated by [Dutch writer Luuk] van Middelaar as the coup that essentially founded today's Union".

Scholars such as Germany's Dieter Grimm challenge Pescatore: those who drafted the treaties creating the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community, he argues, would have regarded the court's key decisions as "revolutionary because the principles they announced were not agreed in the treaties... and almost certainly would not have been agreed on had the issues been raised".

The British author Thomas Horsley also doubts the legitimacy of the court's power-grabbing work: the Treaty of Rome granted the Court of Justice judicial oversight only "with respect to acts of

the Union institutions", not those of member states. The contrary decisions cannot be claimed to represent the spirit of the treaty when its text clearly states the opposite, says Horsley: the court "is irrefutably subject to compliance with EU treaties".

All-powerful, incomprehensible
In any normal democracy, says Anderson, a court's decisions are "subject to alteration or abrogation by elected legislatures. Those of the [Court of Justice of the European Union] are not. They are irreversible." It would require a new treaty, signed by every member state, to overturn an Court of Justice decision – a wholly improbable scenario. Meanwhile, every decision has constitutional force, such that it must be reflected in each successive EU treaty, whose consequently extreme length renders them, in effect, "enormous cryptograms beyond the patience or grasp of any democratic public". As the court's current president said in 1990: *"There is simply no nucleus of sovereignty that the member states can invoke, as such, against the Community."*

But what of Germany's 'basic law' (*Grundgesetz*), supposedly immutable, as administered by the German constitutional court in Karlsruhe? The judges there have declared that it cannot be overridden by the Court of Justice of the European Union, but in considering five challenges over the years have always avoided any actual confrontation.
Horsley criticises the European Court of Justice not just for its lack of democratic legitimacy but for its weakness in technical expertise, not least because a court of general jurisdiction is so wide in its scope that 'expertise' has little bearing.
Grimm makes a broader criticism: in issuing "prohibitions of discrimination against foreign companies" with such "missionary zeal", "almost any national regulation could be understood as a market access obstacle".

2. The European Commission
In his essay, Anderson turns then to the European Commission, the 'government' of the European Union, which comprises one politician from each member state, supported by tens of thousands of civil servants. He starts with its first president:

"Between 1958 and 1964, [Walter] Hallstein presided over a Commission that was a dynamo of energy in finding ways and means to circumvent the Treaty of Rome in the higher interests of European unity."

The commission and its key directorates – for competition and legal services – were responsible for 80% of the cases brought before the Court of Justice, so building "an ever more extensive edifice of European law trumping the rights of national legislatures": what Hallstein described in 1964 as "the beginnings of a real and full 'political union'".
It would be another 20 years before an equally activist president took office: Jacques Delors, "a far more charismatic and commanding figure than Hallstein". He oversaw the introduction of the Single European Act and the drive towards a single currency, embodied in the Maastricht Treaty.
He also pursued a "solidarity" agenda, seeing redistribution as part of cross-regional social justice. However, the scale of the cohesion funds he secured was, Anderson thinks, "little more than the alms of an instrumental charity".

Structurally, the enlargement of the European Union has allocated a commission post to each of the 27 remaining states, such that a majority, even if representing less than 13% of the EU's population, could in theory outvote the commissioners from the six largest states, representing 70% of that population. But, says Anderson: "Decisions are always taken by 'consensus' – that is, behind a façade of unanimity, under impulsion or veto of the six major states."

67

Commissioners are appointed for five-year terms and supported by 33,000 permanent bureaucrats, who preside over the union's accumulated set of rules, the *acquis communitaire*, which has grown from some 2,800 pages at the time the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973 to a mammoth 90,000 pages capturing all the behaviour and norms that a succession of subsequent applicants were required to sign up to before admission.

Anderson calls it "*the most formidable written monument of bureaucratic expansion in human history*"; together with the 34 "procedures" used within the commission, it makes the workings of the union virtually impenetrable for normal citizens – though presumably not for the army of 30,000 registered lobbyists in Brussels, mostly representing corporate interests.

The *acquis* – in its complexity and scope – serves further to consolidate the centrality of the court and the commission at the expense of member states, along with their constitutional courts, their diplomats and their civil servants; and it is in a state of constant expansion.

3. Powerless parliament

As for the European Parliament – originally a mere 'Assembly' – the minor accretions of power over the decades have scarcely moved the dial in terms of democratic accountability. The 705 MEPs, supported by a staff of over 7,000, cannot "elect a government, initiate legislation, levy taxes, shape welfare, or determine any foreign policy". In short, concludes Anderson, "it is a semblance of a parliament, as ordinarily understood, that falls far short of the reality", within which political differences become "all but completely invisible".

Turnout in European elections has often fallen below the 50% mark; likewise, attendance by the deputies at parliamentary sessions. Most decisions on legislation are reached at 'trilogue' meetings between representatives of the commission, the parliament and the Council of Ministers, which comprises ministers from member states' national governments. Anderson cites Christopher Bickerton's book 'European Integration':

> "Between 2009 and 2013, 81 percent of proposals [from the commission] were passed at first reading via the trilogue method; only 3 per cent ever reached third reading, which is where texts are debated in plenary sessions of the Parliament."

Anderson sees a wide gap between the parliament and those it ostensibly represents. Eighty per cent of Dutch MEPs supported the draft European Constitutional Treaty, which was rejected by 62% of Dutch voters in 2005. The previous year, only 39% of the Dutch electorate had turned out for the European parliamentary elections; compare that with the 63% who voted against the wishes of their MEPs on the constitutional treaty.

"The Parliament," Anderson says, "is the least consequential component of the Union" – but at least it supplies a "measure of the legitimation that any self-respecting liberal order requires".

Rule of Law under attack

One thing I know – ALL POWER CORRUPTS. I know that because I was a senior politician for 22 years and could feel and see its effects on both myself and my colleagues.

And that was the 1970s when - despite the swirling doubts - idealism was still in play, understood and respected.

But power brings yes-men, groupthink and conceit. Politicians are generally well-intentioned and, by nature, seek applause. Criticism they will attribute to malevolence – journalists are written off as purveyors of gossip who are too cynical to appreciate the good intentions of the policy-makers.

Sadly, however, those with power make little attempt to run their policy ideas through critical testing - u**nless they are in a political system which forces them to seek consensus** – such as Germany and, increasingly, mainland Europe with their coalition government.

But the negotiation which is central to the political system of many European countries is actually a dirty word in England. **Britain, like the US, has chosen an adversarial two-party system** – in the belief that this can better smoke out the truth. The reality couldn't be further from the truth – with groupthink being strongly evident in both countries. A senior Conservative Minister indeed once argued in an important lecture (in the 1970s) that the UK was "an elective dictatorship". And that was in an era when the civil service still functioned to challenge simplistic policy ideas - nowadays the echo-chamber of political advisers have replaced neutral civil servants. One prominent political commentator put it very aptly - this Prime Minister is so weak that he has surrounded himself with "courtiers"

The absence of a constitution is certainly a curious feature in the modern age – and british citizens were stunned to learn in 2019 that their Prime Minister apparently had the power to send parliament packing when he found it troublesome. Only an appeal to the country's new Supreme Court by a citizen saved parliament's skin – but a supine press which had branded such judges as "enemies of the state" gives the government full scope to rein in such judicial cheek.

I had actually wanted to write about a great paper which was commissioned by an Irish member of the European Parliament about the rule of law in European countries (which now excludes the UK) - but **find myself sidetracked by the scandal which has blown up this week by Boris Johnson's typically ham-fisted attempt to protect one of his parliamentary friends from scrutiny**.

The details are boring – what it boils down to is that not only was a British PM prepared to throw out an agreed system of scrutiny and bring in a new one simply to protect a friend but that he actually required his conservative MPs (at 24 hours' notice) to vote that way. With strong protests 250 MPs actually did what they were told – an honourable few had the decency to abstain or vote against. When all opposition parties refused to participate in the new system, Johnson backed down. This was a good article on the debacle – just the latest in a long line of crass stupidities from the British government

> There is an Arabic expression that warns against the perils of an abundance of wealth: "Loose money teaches theft." Britain has the dubious honour of being the home of the loose money of the global rich, facilitating its movement through secret offshore companies, setting up entirely legal means to profit from these opaque transactions.

Taking liberties in office tends to work the same way. Loose power teaches corruption, which in turn happens through technically above-board means. That loose power broadly requires three further conditions to trigger misconduct –

- *a craven or cowed press,*
- *a lack of what is seen as a viable political alternative and*
- *a large section of the public made quiescent, either through apathy or tribalism.*

Sound familiar? Welcome to the global community of those living under corrupt governance. The good news is that you are not alone. The bad news is that, once corruption starts to set in, it becomes very hard to reverse. It becomes (this will also sound familiar to you), "priced in" to people's expectations of the political class, even institutionalised.

People in those other countries – the ones you more easily associate with corruption than your own – will explain the subtle evolution: what was before a furtive cash bribe that you needed to pay for a government stamp becomes an official fee that you are handed a nice crisp receipt for. What was before an outrageous grab of power from a democratically elected government becomes a legal process blessed by an election, perhaps one even overseen by international observers. The unprincipled will not be shunned but enriched and honoured.

The press will contradict what you have seen with your own eyes. Conspiracy theories will begin to flourish because everyone is in the business of making up narratives, so the truth becomes a matter of spinning and selling the most convincing lie. Ministers might even, after attempting to rig a regulatory system in their favour, tell you that their government is trying to "restore a degree of integrity and probity in public life". It will begin to exhaust your sense of outrage and warp your sense of right and wrong.

Eventually what will begin to settle is a sense that you as an individual have no control, no matter how many freedoms – voting, protesting – you feel you can exercise. Those rights will feel like levers that aren't connected to anything. And so you give up. The main political emotion I grew up with in the Middle East and north Africa was not that of suffering oppression, but of jaundice – a sort of cultivated cynicism that protected us against the despair of life under regimes that stole from us and then remade the rules in their favour.

I have felt this creeping up on me in the UK. It is an impulse that I recognise in the continuing support for the Conservatives, or the tepid resistance to them despite their proven malpractice, their endless scandals, their failure to deliver on what were once considered basic criteria for governments: that the state does everything it can to protect its citizens' lives in a pandemic, and that most people's material circumstances get better with time.

Once the state withdraws from that role of honest broker and facilitator, the result is a fatalism: we must carry on and make do with what we have.

Rule of Law in EU

2004 saw 10 new member countries admitted to the European Union. Just 2 countries were judged not sufficiently ready – **Bulgaria and Romania** – *on grounds of their levels of corruption and judicial incapacity*. They were both eventually admitted to the EU on 1st January 2007 – but, uniquely, **subjected to an annual inspection through a new procedure called the Cooperation and Verification mechanism (CVM).**

Coincidentally, these are the 2 countries in which I have lived since 2007 – indeed I had no sooner returned to Romania from an 8 year stint in Central Asia than I took up a position as Team Leader in Sofia in a project for training regional and local officials to ensure the country's compliance with EU legislation.

Schengen and the Euro give Bulgaria and Romania additional reasons for feeling the smack of second-class citizenship – particularly because after more than a decade they have not managed to satisfy the taskmasters in Brussels on judicial reform. The requirement for annual reports on judicial aspects and corruption continued until 2019 when it was replaced by the Rule of Law Mechanism (RLM) which necessitates an annual report to be submitted to the Commission by each and every member country.

Bulgaria and Romania had by then become the least of the EU's concerns - **Hungary and Poland** had quickly instituted significant departures from the rule of law – packing courts with political appointees, severely limiting media freedom and making political use of European Funds. And some older member countries such as France and Spain were considered to have questionable aspects to their judicial and constitutional systems

Much of this had passed me by – what caught my attention at the weekend was the release of a **critical report** commissioned by an Irish MEP Clare Daley on the 2021 **assessment by the European Commission** - which engages in a dialogue with member countries about their submissions.

Her report – called Binding the Guardians – is just over 100 pages long and was written by a well-known political economist Albena Azmanova who basically analyses how well the European Commission is fulfilling the task of holding member countries to account for their observation of the Rule of Law. It starts, brilliantly, by suggesting four tests for the Commission's work -

> We suggest that, in order to effectively comply with the rule of law while conducting its annual rule of law surveys, the **Commission needs to be guided by (at least) four norms**:
> - clarity of communication,
> - thoroughness in addressing rule of law violations (that is, in the full range and depth of detail),
> - equal treatment of the subjects of power, and
> - impartiality in the use of power (in the sense of not having a narrow partisan-political agenda).
>
> Obscurity is a fertile ground for arbitrariness, omissions tacitly condone what is omitted, favoritism disempowers some, and partisan-political considerations harm the common good.

Azmanova then applies these tests to the Commission commentary and finds the following problems

- A dangerous conflation of "rule of Law" with aspects of procedural democracy
- Vague, overly-diplomatic language
- Restricted focus - The Commission report delimits its range to four areas: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media freedom, and 'other institutional checks and balances'.
- Failing to include the operations of the private sector

At this stage, I'm conscious that I recently took a vow of brevity and that I am about to share excerpts from the report which will double the size of this post......so having tantalised you with the summary, I'll continue shortly

Why the Rule of Law is fundamental

We used to take the Rule of Law for granted in Britain – although we were aware that it was a privilege unknown to billions of people throughout the world. Gradually, however, we have been disabused of the trust that we had previously put in our legal and judicial system and in the police – let alone our political class and "the fourth estate".
That's why I chose to lead, in what is becoming another mini-series, with the post about the latest UK "sleaze" in a government for whom corruption has become nothing short of systemic. If the UK were still a member of the European Union, it would now be in danger of being named and shamed in the same breath as **Hungary and Poland** to which the previous post briefly referred - and **whose transgressions are well summarised by the Commission** in its latest (32 pages) report on Hungary and then its 2021 report on Poland (38 pages)

I had mentioned an excellent report commissioned by an Irish member of the Left grouping in the European Parliament which gives fascinating case studies of three member countries – France, Spain and Bulgaria. The French judicial system is ultimately controlled by the Executive – which is inconsistent with the separation of powers; is hugely underfunded; and terrorist incidents have given the French State latitude to increase its powers to a worrying extent.
The MEP's report is authored by Albena Azmanova who was initially educated in Bulgaria – and suggests 4 useful tests to use in the assessment of the quality and scope of the European Commission's analysis; applies these tests to the Commission commentary; and finds the following problems
- A dangerous conflation of "rule of Law" with aspects of procedural democracy
- Vague, overly-diplomatic language
- Restricted focus - The Commission report delimits its range to four areas: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media freedom, and 'other institutional checks and balances'.
- Failing to include the operations of the private sector

A Blurred conceptualisation
In the 2020 Report, the Commission draws connections between the fundamental values: it stipulates that all public powers should not only act within the constraints set by law but also in accordance with democracy and fundamental rights, **and defines legality as implying a democratic process for enacting laws**
The fallacy of conditioning rule of law on democracy is present explicitly even in some of the constitutions of EU member-states – something the Commission as guardian of the rule of law should be criticizing rather than condoning.

Thus, the preamble of the Spanish Constitution registers a commitment to "consolidate a State of Law which ensures the rule of law as the expression of the popular will" (emphasis added). Thus, the rule of law is reduced to legal provisions of democratic origin. This grave conceptual fallacy in the codification of the rule of law has already had nefarious political consequences. Thus, when trying to suspend the Catalan Independence referendum of 2017 with police violence (which was condemned by Human Rights Watch), Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy justified his actions as a matter of defending the law (namely, the Constitutional provision stipulating the "indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation") itself an expression of the will of the Spanish people. The European Commission at the time openly endorsed this

As an aficionado of good clear English, I very much appreciated the way Azmanova dealt with the second issue –

Vague/diplomatic language
While the authority of the Commission is based in its non-political nature and administrative professionalism, it tends to use diplomatic language in which criticism is delivered through euphemisms and understatements. Typically, it speaks about 'weaknesses' and 'needed improvements' to refer to grave problems.

This vagueness diffuses both the responsibility of the perpetrators and that of the Commission. Thus, in its chapter on Bulgaria, the Commission writes that a "lack of transparency of media ownership is considered as a source of concern", and "Bulgaria's regulatory process is considered to be lacking predictability and stability due to frequent changes of the legislation." Who considers this to be of concern? Does the Commission judge that this is a rule of law breach? The wording leaves doubts about the Commission's stance.

To help address this, as a minimum, a clarification of the difference between violations of the law and violations of the rule of law should be offered. As we noted earlier, threats to the rule of law emerge not when the law is violated, but when breaking the law is not punished, when the sanction is not uniform, and when there is no legal and institutional framework to enable that inequities be challenged and corrected. As the Report fails to draw this distinction, it covers an indiscriminate selection of issues: from violations of the law to flawed accountability mechanisms. On the one hand, making this distinction explicit would help dispel a common misperception—that any violation of the law is a rule of law violation—especially if this monitoring mechanism is to play an educational role.

The final two issues can really be rolled into one

Restricted focus of the Commission report
The Report delimits its range to four areas: the justice system, the anti-corruption framework, media freedom, and 'other institutional checks and balances'. Of course, the Commission is right to exercise its discretion in delimiting the range of the Report. **However, to avoid arbitrariness in making such a decision, logical argumentation needs to be offered in justifying this choice—none is given.** The Commission's failure to offer either a thorough or well-justified selection of rule of law violations, is evidence in the following features of the Report

The Commission has chosen, without explicit justification, not to address in a systematic way "accountability mechanisms for law enforcement, the role and independence of public service media, as well as measures taken to ensure that public authorities effectively implement the law and to prevent abuse of administrative powers." (p.5, ft20). It also states that "the country chapters do not purport to give an exhaustive description of all relevant elements of the rule of law situation in Member States but to present significant developments" (p.5).

This is already problematic, as no criterion is offered for how the significance of the chosen developments is established. The Commission thus grants itself an undefined (arbitrary) mandate that enables an arbitrary use of its power.

Letting the Private Sector off the hook
The definition of the rule of law in the Report correctly places an emphasis on the abuse of power but unfortunately it unduly restricts this to public authority ("Under the rule of law, all public powers always act within the constraints set out by law" -p.1) While concerns with rule of law indeed originated in efforts to constrain the arbitrary power of central governments, threats to the rule of law nowadays come also from powerful economic actors. **This is why the Venice Commission uses in its Rule of law checklist a more expansive language: "everyone has the right to be treated by all decision-makers with dignity" (#15), noting that "individual human rights are affected not only by the authorities of the State,** but also by hybrid (state-private) actors and private entities" (#16).
Thus, the Venice Commission updates the rule of law conception to the realities of the 21st century by stating that "all persons and authorities within the State, whether public or private, should be bound by and entitled to the benefit of the rule of law" (#17) (Venice Commission 2016).
Impartiality

Holding Power to Account

I've posted before about how far the United States has become a rogue state. For the last half century at least, the principles of free speech and od democracy have been honoured there in the breach more often than in reality. I was, however, shocked this morning by a Scheerpost reporting two items which reveal just how far the power structure goes to muzzle those who challenge the military-industrial complex
First, human rights attorney Steven Donziger has now been under house arrest in his New York City apartment for two years. The reason for his detainment is that Donziger made it his business to hold Chevron accountable for how the Big Oil megacorp "harmed, sickened and killed tens of thousands in Ecuador" and tried to avoid paying "billions of dollars" in restitutions.

> *Donziger's battle against American oil companies and on behalf of indigenous communities and farmers in Ecuador spans nearly three decades. He was part of an international legal team that represented indigenous groups in Northern Ecuador where, as he tells Camp, from the 1960s to the '90s Texaco (now Chevron) deliberately "dumped billions of gallons of cancer-causing toxic waste" into local waterways, costing thousands of people their health, livelihood—even their lives. Though in 2011 the lawsuit culminated in a historic $9.5 billion pollution judgment, Chevron brass subsequently focused on going after Donziger rather than paying the fee. In late July, he was hit with a six counts of criminal contempt, a conviction stemming in part from his refusal to turn over his computer and other devices, which he fought last month with a request for a new trial. His ongoing pre-trial detainment for a misdemeanor offense is unprecedented for any person without a prior criminal record in federal court. (Click here to watch Chris Hedges' interview with Donziger, and listen to Robert Scheer's "Scheer Intelligence" podcast episode with Donziger here.)*

The second example is of a former intelligence analyst in the drone program for the Air Force who as a private contractor leaked some 17 classified documents about drone strikes to the press, was sentenced today to 45 months in prison.

The documents, published by The Intercept on October 15, 2015, exposed that between January 2012 and February 2013, US special operations airstrikes killed more than 200 people. Of those, only 35 were the intended targets. For one five-month period of the operation, according to the documents, nearly 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes were not the intended targets. The civilian dead, usually innocent bystanders, were routinely classified as "enemies killed in action." The Justice Department coerced Hale, who was deployed to Afghanistan in 2012, on March 31 to plead guilty to one count of violating the Espionage Act, a law passed in 1917 designed to prosecute those who passed on state secrets to a hostile power, not those who expose to the public government lies and crimes. Hale admitted as part of the plea deal to "retention and transmission of national security information" and leaking 11 classified documents to a journalist. If he had refused the plea deal, he could have spent 50 years in prison.

But what's really sinister about the case is, as Chris Hedges puts it, that

Those charged under the act are treated as if they were spies. They are barred from explaining motivations and intent to the court. They cannot provide evidence to the court of the government lawlessness and war crimes they exposed. Prominent human rights organizations, such as the ACLU and PEN, along with mainstream publications, such as The New York Times and CNN, have largely remained silent about the prosecution of Hale.

The sentencing of Hale is, of course, one more potentially mortal blow to the freedom of the press in the USA. It follows in the wake of the prosecutions and imprisonment of other whistleblowers under the Espionage Act including Chelsea Manning, Jeffrey Sterling, Thomas Drake and John Kiriakou, who spent two-and-a-half years in prison for exposing the routine torture of suspects held in black sites. Chris Hedges continues

The group Stand with Daniel Hale has called on President Biden to pardon Hale and end the use of the Espionage Act to punish whistleblowers. It is also collecting donations for Hale's legal fund. The bipartisan onslaught against the press — Barack Obama used the Espionage Act eight times against whistleblowers, more than all other previous administrations combined — by criminalizing those within the system who seek to inform the public is ominous for our democracy. It is effectively extinguishing all investigations into the inner workings of power.

Not that the Americans are the only ones up to dirty tricks of this sort. Just a few nights ago, I had watched the 2019 film Official Secrets which told the case of whistleblower Katharine Gun, who leaked a memo exposing an illegal spying operation by American and British intelligence services to gauge sentiment of and potentially blackmail United Nations diplomats tasked to vote on a resolution regarding the 2003 invasion of Iraq
Her defence team decided on the plea that Katharine was acting out of loyalty to her country by seeking to prevent the UK from being led into an unlawful war in Iraq. Former Foreign Office deputy legal adviser, Elizabeth Wilmshurst, had famously resigned when the UK Attorney General Peter Goldsmith changed his position on the legality of the Iraq War after meeting with several lawyers from the Bush administration. Despite the odds stacked against them, Katharine refused to plead guilty in exchange for a reduced charge.
On the day of the trial, the Crown prosecutor dropped all charges against Katharine on the grounds that prosecuting her would have shown that Bliar led the UK into war on false pretences.

Little wonder that one of the books on [my recent reading list](#) was [Unaccountable – how the elite brokers corrupt](#); Janine Wedel (2014)

Is there a future for liberal democracy?

America dared in December to convene a so-called "[summit of democracies](#)". I have argued that [the US no longer deserves to be considered a democracy](#) - so [it's a bit cheeky of them](#) (to put it mildly) to dare to offer a lead such as this.... Tom Carrothers is someone for whom I have a great deal of respect – and he offered [these video comments on the event a week later](#)

Between 1950 and 1980, we had an effective and balanced system in which each type of power – economic (companies/banks etc), political (citizens and workers) and legal/admin/military (the state) – balanced the other. None was dominant.

Deindustrialisation, however, destroyed that balance – more specifically the power which working class people had been able to exercise in that period through votes and unions. Has been undermined. In its place a thought system developed - justifying corporate greed and the privileging (through tax breaks and favourable legislation) of the large international company.

- All political parties and most media have been captured by that thought system which now rules the world
- People have, as a result, become cynical and apathetic
- Privatisation is a disaster – inflicting costs on the public and transferring wealth to the few
- Two elements of the "balanced system" (Political and legal power) are now supine before the third (corporate and media power). The balance is broken and the dominant power ruthless in its exploitation of its new freedom
- It is very difficult to see a "countervailing power" which would make these corporate elites pull back from the disasters they are inflicting on us
- Social protest is marginalized - not least by the combination of the media and an Orwellian "security state" ready to act against "dissidence"
- But the beliefs which lie at the dark heart of the neo-liberal project need more detailed exposure
- as well as its continued efforts to undermine what little is left of state power
- We need to be willing to express more vehemently the arguments against privatisation - existing and proposed
- to feel less ashamed about arguing for "the commons" and for things like cooperatives and social enterprise (inasmuch as such endeavours are allowed)

But the elite - and the media which services their interests - **noticed something was wrong only when Brexit and Trump triumphed – in 2016. But that was simply the point at which the dam broke – the pressure had been building up for much longer.**

If we really want to understand what is going on we have to go much further back – not just to the beginning of the new millennium when the first waves of populist anger started - but to the 1970s when the post-war consensus started to crumble – as Anthony Barnett, for one, most recently argued in his extended essay "[Out of the Belly of Hell](#)" (2020)

The demos have been giving the Elites a clear warning – "your social model sucks". We may not like some aspects of what the crowd is saying – for example the need for border

restrictions….but we ignore its message at our peril. So far I don't see a very credible Elite response. Indeed, the response so far reminds me of nothing less than that of the clever Romans who gave the world Bread and Circuses. Governments throughout the world have a common way of dealing with serious problems – it starts with denial, moves on to sacrificial lambs, official inquiries and bringing in the clowns - and finishes with "panem et circenses"

But the post was too cynical. It failed to offer a way out. And for more than a decade, people in different parts of the world have been working on what is various called "deliberative democracy" or citizen juries to give inspiring examples of that way out. I hinted at this in an April post and indeed gave quite a few examples of other tools determined governments could use - if they actually wanted to develop their capacity. But that's a bit like asking turkeys to vote for an early Christmas!

Let me therefore make amends with two shortish articles which offer the best introduction to developments in this field - first this and then the second part here

And, if that whets your appetite, I would recommend this short book Democratic innovations – designing institutions for citizen participation; by someone who was the research director of the famous UK Power inquiry of 2004

And, finally, for those who want to know more about the operation of citizen juries, here's the website of The Citizen Convention for UK democracy

Background Reading on the growing recognition for more citizen input (in descending chronological order)

Catching the Deliberative Wave (OECD 2020) Executive summary of recent important book Innovate Citizen Participation and new democratic institutions - catching the Deliberative Wave which tries to help the global elite make sense of the latest challenge to their rule

Macron's Grand Debat; useful article about the French approach

citizen jury experience (2016) german; rather academic

Creating Freedom – the lottery of birth, the illusion of consent, the fight for freedom Raoul Martinez (2016) Fascinating book which starts from the proposition that the current failure of our social systems must lead us to question our foundational beliefs

Waves of Democracy – social movement and political change; John Markoff (2015 2nd edition) looks a pretty definitive approach to recent developments – by a Pittsburgh political sociologist with a strong background in history and in other cultures – and a very good writing style

Can Democracy be Saved? - participation, deliberation and social movements; Donatella Della Porta (2013) Too much of the discussion on democracy is conducted by anglo-saxon political scientists. Here an Italian sociologist makes the connection to the social movement literature, offering 4 models of democracy. The writing style is a bit too academic for me

The New Machiavelli – how to wield power in the modern world ; Jonathan Powell (2011) Tony Bliar's Chief of Staff offers some insights into how the government class thinks.

Moral politics – how conservatives and liberals think; George Lakoff (1996) an important psychologist sets out our tribal thinking – well-written

Power in movement – social movement and contentious politics; Sydney Tarrow (2011 edition – first in 1994) one of the key writers in this field, he manages to elucidate what is a huge literature in a very clear manner.

Metaphors we live By George Lakoff (1980) our very words betray us

Contentious Politics C Tilly and S Tarrow (2015)

The New Machiavelli HG Wells

3.   Can Societies reinvent themselves??

Hungary and Poland are in obvious trouble as they challenge basic tenets of liberal Europe. But, if we were honest, many more countries could and should be asking themselves difficult questions about the quality of their government systems.

Unfortunately, the State has for the past few decades been losing what capacity it had throughout Europe and the rest of the world. The global financial meltdown of 2008 and the austerity policies that produced have only compounded the process. The political class's dedication to the idea of the minimal state promoted by globalisation and neoliberalism has, since the start of the new millennium, encouraged many citizens to change their traditional voting patterns.

This section focuses on the tragic failure of the rule of law to take root these past 30 years in central and eastern europe. Recent elections in Bulgaria and Romania – where I have lived since 2007 - have demonstrated the extent to which people have, understandably, completely lost trust in their governments and in the State. Adages of good governance and anti-corruption have been tried – and failed. More than a dozen posts explore this disillusionment as well as raising some questions which need to be asked about this failure -

- how do we find out what conciliation efforts have already been attempted - let alone lessons learned - in BG and RO? South Africa had hundreds of such efforts
- how would effective and "trustworthy" mediators be identified? There's an Association of Conciliators here in Romania (presumably for commercial and family disputes) but perhaps they have relevant resources?
- who are the key actors who would be involved in any such meeting?
- how do we identify the positive lessons from other efforts throughout the world to bring societies together? Latin America clearly has had many such efforts
- how do we deal with the cynics who dismiss such experience as irrelevant to their country?

A Taste of the blogposts on this question

Title	Main takeaway
Getting to Denmark?	Why it's become an urgent question once more. One possible approach
Mission Impossible	some preliminary questions which need to be explored by activists in any country
Against Binary Thinking	Examples of national reconciliation efforts
Helping people help themselves	The fundamental lessons from the development experience is that outsiders need to stop interfering!!
Good Governance Revisited	A good idea which went wrong as it was imposed from outside Its various elements explained in theory and reality
Improving our lot	A breathless summary of the ideas of better government – reading list
Effective government still a work in progress	the seduction of Europe's structural funds
Whatever happened to	corruption of the older member states – the real story behind the AC agenda

anti-corruption??	
In Transit	what the west and east make of each others' state bodies
The pygmies take over	The crumbling of independent challenge to power
Bulgaria under the radar	A detailed critique of a country few know about
Trouble Ahead	Poland and Hungary question the role of the European Court of Justice Streeck
Inconclusion Focus on what's important	"The long game" – 2017 EC tools and SIGMA

Getting to Denmark?

It's been fashionable recently to write about how countries fail – but the challenge of **finding countries** which have put together a winning formula and emerged as both economic and socio-political **successes** has *proven much more difficult*. Germany, Japan and South Korea are about the only cases quoted – with tiny countries such as Estonia and Singapore also being acknowledged. **But all, save Estonia, go back to the post-war period**…..

Thanks to Francis Fukuyama, this has recently become known as the "Getting to Denmark" conundrum – although such references fail to recognise the important lessons contained in the remarkable transformation which took place in late 19th century Scandinavia as it moved from a focus on agriculture to become highly sophisticated industrial societies.
It is only recently – with the publication of books such as The Nordic Secret (2017) by Tomas Bjorkman and Nordic Ideology (2019) by Hanzi Freinacht that we are getting a proper understanding of scale of the collective effort that lies behind Scandinavian social democracy – and which goes back to local thinkers of the early part of the century who laid the philosophical basis for the popular high schools such as the Dane Nikolai Grundtvig.
I had a base in Copenhagen in the early 1990s – and remember pinning posters on my wall of such men as Grundtvig

A couple of decades ago, global bodies were shoving "**good governance**" down the throat of recalcitrant countries as a precondition of admittance to select clubs such as the EU – although any efforts to comply were immediately relaxed on admission.
And progress in countries such as Hungary and Poland has been in a consistently rapid backward direction – with others such as **Bulgaria** and **Romania** not even trying very hard in the first instance. Both are still (after more than a decade) subject to the "conditionalities" of the Compliance monitoring of judicial systems – with the efforts Romania has certainly made in that sector being consistently challenged in recent judgements in the European Court of Justice in what increasingly looks to have been collusion between the country's Prosecutor and its Secret Services.

All this I have covered in posts in the last decade. But I have – like most of the literature – devoted almost no space to how such countries might end the vicious downward spiral and find

ways to return some hope to their despairing citizens. Alasdair Roberts put it very well in his "Strategies for Governing" -

> **We must recover the capacity to talk about the fundamentals of government**, because the fundamentals matter immensely. Right now, there are billions of people on this planet who suffer terribly because governments cannot perform basic functions properly.
> - People live in fear because governments cannot protect their homes from war and crime.
> - They live in poverty because governments cannot create the conditions for trade and commerce to thrive.
> - They live in pain because governments cannot stop the spread of disease.
> - And they live in ignorance because governments do not provide opportunities for education.

Almost 3 years ago, one of Romania's foremost analysts shared a despairing article but was least convincing when he tried to offer a way forward

> I have a list of what to do – starting with the need for an exploration of what sort of Romania we should be aiming for in the next few decades. Such a process would be moderated by professionals using proper diagnostics, scenario thinking and milestones.
> It would be managed by a group with a vision emancipated from the toxic present.

The Future Search method offers one such approach It's how I started my own political journey in 1971 – with an annual conference in a shipbuilding town facing the decline of the trade on which it had depended for so long….But any venture would have to demonstrate that it can deal with the astonishing level of distrust of others shown by the fact that, in 2014, only 7% of the Romanian population could say that "most people can be trusted" (compared with about 20% in Italy and 40% in Germany). **For my money Social Trust is one of the fundamental elements of the soil in which democracy grows. From the start of the transition countries such as Bulgaria and Romania have been caught up in a global neo-liberalism tsunami which has been corroding that soil….**

South Africa is the country people select when they want a recent example of positive reconciliation. Clearly **Nelson Mandela** was an exceptional visionary – but he did not work alone. He brought with him the support and assistance of the sort of people Dorel Sandor was referring to – professionals not associated with the "toxic present".
But where are they to be found? What professional, religious or other groups can inspire the trust that Bulgaria and Romania need?

Earlier this year I indicated some of the toolkits available for those seriously interested in building a country back together. **But they can be used ONLY when a country has taken the first step and brought together the warring factions to forge a new future together.**
The authors D Acemoglu and J Robinson who produced "How Countries Fail" produced in 2019 a new book The Narrow Corridor which is summarised in this presentation.
The Transformation of the Swedish Model? Mark Blyth (World Politics 2001)

Mission Impossible

The last post suggested that few authors had dared tackle the question of how to pull a country out of the vicious circle of decline – choosing instead to focus on how nations have failed. Of course, there are numerous books about economically successful countries – Ruchir Sharma is an investor who followed up his 2013 book Breakout Nations – in pursuit of the next economic miracles about the BRIC countries with 10 Rules of Successful Nations. And Turkish economist Murat Yulek recently produced a very thorough analysis How Nations Succeed – manufacturing, trade, industrial policy, economic lopment (2018)

But **these focus exclusively on economic** factors – or rather on the mix of policy, commercial and financial considerations which get an economy going.

The question which I want to explore is how the wider social system - consisting of the key government, business, trade union, media, academic, NGO, religious figures might be persuaded in a polarised society to come together to forge a new beginning with a reasonable chance of success…

I start with a particular interest in **Bulgaria** and **Romania** whose citizens, 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, feel a strong sense of hopelessness captured, for example, in a despairing article in one of Romania's cultural journals summarised here – with a follow-up explanatory note here. My understanding of a situation for which both external and internal actors are equally to blame is described in a longer 2018 post-

> *- in the early 90s everyone (particularly outside Romania) expected too much although Ralf Dahrendorf - unique in his experience as both a German and British politician and one of the first academics in the 50s to explore the nature of the social changes which took place in Germany in the first half of the 20th century (Society and Democracy in Germany) - had warned in 1990 that real cultural change would take "two generations". This means 50 years!*
> *- Absolutely no preparations existed in 1989 for the possibility that communism might collapse and for the choices this would present for political, economic and legal systems …..Everyone had assumed that the change would be in the opposite direction. The only writings which could be drawn were those about the south American, Portugese and Spanish transition ….*
> *- The EC stopped treating Romania as in need of "developmental assistance" in 1998/99. The PHARE programme was phased out - the focus shifted to training for EU membership and the implementation of the Acquis (using the TAIEX programme). Talk of differences in political culture was seen as politically incorrect – eastern countries simply had to learn the language and habits of the European social market and, hey-presto, things would magically change……*
> *- 30 years on, the names of Bulgarian and Romanian institutions and processes may have changed but not the fundamental reality – with a corruption which is nothing less than systemic.*
> *- The billions of Euros allocated to Romania since 2007 under the EC's Structural Funds programmes have compounded the systemic and moral corruption which affects all sectors.*
> *- The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism is, after 14 years, deeply resented – despite the increasingly clear evidence of the collusion between the Prosecution and the Secret services…..*

Historians of different sorts have, of course, published numerous books mapping what happened **in each of the countries after 1989.** Tom Gallagher is particularly good on the political aspects of Romania with "The Theft of a Nation – Romania since Communism" (2005) and "Romania and the European Union; how the Weak Vanquished the strong" (2009)

But I know of only two English-language texts which have tried to analyse both economic and political aspects -

The Great Rebirth – lessons from the victory of capitalism over communism ; Anders Aslud and Simeon Djankov (2015) which tells the story from the view point of some of the key actors at the time

Ruling Ideas – how global neoliberalism goes local Cornel Ban (2016) which is a left-wing Romanian critique of how neoliberalism got its grip on countries such as Romania and Spain

The sorts of questions which need to be explored include

- how do we confirm that these countries have polarised systems? Presumably with the annual Eurobarmeter reports?
- how do we find out what conciliation efforts *transitional justice) have already been attempted - let alone lessons learned in BG and RO? South Africa had hundreds of such efforts
- how would effective and "trustworthy" mediators be identified? There's an Association of Conciliators here in Romania presumably for commercial and family disputes but perhaps they have relevant resources?
- who are the key actors who would be involved in any such meeting?
- how do we identify the positive lessons from other efforts throughout the world to bring societies together? Latin America clearly has had many such efforts
- how do we deal with the cynics who dismiss such experience as irrelevant to their country?

For those who want a good reading list about Romania, I recommend the compilation at the end of this post

Against Binary thinking

I generally don't like to see it suggested that the world consists of two sorts of people – us and them; insiders and outsiders; left and right. Perhaps it's my mugwump, "on the fence", instinct but, if there's a Third Way, I'll opt for it. Even better - a matrix choice eg grid-group theory or the 6-7 Belbin Team Roles. We are, after all. complex individuals – if sometimes not as original as we would like to think.
But there are always some exceptions…I've always liked McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y which divides us on the basis of whether we trust others or not.

And I've had to recognise that I am very much an "Ideas" – as distinct from "People" – person. I focus more on that WHAT than the HOW – I am particularly weak on the human aspect of issues. That's not to say that I underestimate the importance of implementation – but my strength – when I was pursuing a political career - was networking and forging alliances with **like-minded** people rather than **trying to persuade the recalcitrant**. I never enjoyed the "glad-handing" which was such a feature of Lyndon Johnson's success.
Gordon Brown had a similar upbringing to mine – and suffered for his patent inability to suffer fools gladly…

So the books on conciliation I have been looking at recently are quite a revelation. The author of

[Power and Love – a theory and practice of social change](#) (2010) has for several decades led multi-stakeholder groups as they work together on complex, intractable problems eg projects involving siloed organizations in the global food system; the post-1991 South African reconciliation process; warring Israeli and Palestinian factions; and antagonistic Canadian stakeholders wrestling with climate change. Originally trained as a physicist, economist, and energy policy expert, Adam Kahane worked for years at Royal Dutch Shell PLC's renowned group planning department — the part of the company that developed much of the current-day practice of scenario planning.

When people from warring factions come together they bring with them a strange mixture of very human strengths and weaknesses – not just interests but perceptions. Kahane's book suggests there are **two sides to power – the positive "power-to" and the negative "power-over".** And the same for the softer side – which can be almost inviting domination or more assertive.

His book on "Power and Love" he wrote apparently to counter what he felt was an insufficient emphasis on the "power" aspects in his first book "[Solving Tough Problems – an open way of talking, listening and creating new realities](#)" (2004)

[This interview has a good exchange](#) about **the need to keep the forces of power and what he calls "love" in balance**

> KAHANE: I'd say 70 percent of the senior people — in business, government, and the nonprofit world — fall into either the power camp or the love camp. Those in the power camp think that compassion and empathy are soft emotions, that they don't matter in the working world, and that they should be relegated to the home, family, and romance. They see the weak, degenerative side of love — which certainly exists.
> But they fall into a trap. The exercise of power without love becomes reckless, abusive, and ultimately counterproductive and fragile. When businesspeople focus relentlessly on finishing the mission, getting on with the job, at the cost of their connection to employees, communities, or the environment, they lose their long-term legitimacy and viability. When I worked on regional development problems in Houston, I had a number of encounters with Ken Lay, then the CEO of Enron, and I saw first-hand the phenomenon of entrepreneurialism without responsibility. There are many Enrons, practicing power without love and suffering less-dramatic versions of the same fate. But love without power is equally prevalent — and equally dangerous for people trying to accomplish something. It's just not as widely understood.

> KAHANE:
> Nothing happens without the dirty, nitty-gritty recognition that everyone in a complex problem situation is asking, "What's in it for me?" I've made the mistake of overlooking those interests, and therefore getting stuck. At one tough workshop of South African leaders, my co-facilitator Ishmael Mkhabela turned to me and said: "Adam, [these attendees] are not nuns, they are not priests; they have not taken vows not to have interests. People's interests are not the problem; it is only a problem when those of one overpower those of others." **We see the same issue come up in climate change work, and in any work on social governance; people try to make the conversation nonpartisan. But you've got to let everybody bring up their partisan interests openly**, and see what you can do once you know what they are. You're not just looking out for the good of the whole system. You have to attend to the parts as well, because that's where the power — the ability to get things done —

resides.

A number of people have observed that the worst conflicts about power tend to occur in idealistic organizations, such as those in the fields of healthcare and education. Maybe this is why. Just when you're getting to the really tough issues, somebody stops everything by proclaiming, "remember the patients" or "remember the children." That's not helpful. Nobody had forgotten the patients and the children, but these statements obscure the necessary, difficult work of dealing with particular interests.

S+B: **Why do people find it so difficult to keep both power and love in mind?**
KAHANE: Because of deeply held beliefs. As a power person, I tend to hesitate to open myself up because I think if I do, I'll get hurt. And I know a lot of people in the love camp who say, "Well, I don't want to assert myself because I think I'll hurt someone."
A fair number of people — maybe **10 to 30 percent of those in a typical company** — are skilful at both. Many of the people I admire balance the two imperatives, and all of us can become more conscious of it and consistent at it. ….Organizations also have difficulties maintaining this balance. Aren't there organizations that, under stress, revert to power or revert to love? Aren't there societies that do the same?

Helping People Help Themselves

"Development" is a strange word. It's been prefixed to so many other words – community, economic, rural, regional, social, urban – that we tend to overlook it. It generally has a positive connotation – although only when used within the boundaries of a particular country. Something seems to go seriously wrong when "development" is encouraged by outsiders. That, at any rate, is the general view now taken by "development theorists" – the people who write about and advise what used to be called "developing" countries. In the 1970s and 1980s these were predominantly economists but "good governance" specialists became active in the 1990s.

The development field has become a highly contested one – with writers from the political extremes sharing a highly critical approach to the conventional wisdom coming from centrist liberals. The right-wing (Bauer, Easterley) consider that Foreign Aid just builds up "dependence" whilst the left-wing accuse the centrist liberals of aiding and abetting imperialism. These are the essential currents at the heart of the [current British debate about the cuts to the UK Foreign Aid budget](#).
Foreign Aid seems to be a very distinctive topic – almost sui generis. But scratch the other "development" types – social, rural, regional, urban, educational – and we find the **same pattern of someone in authority trying to get others to behave in certain ways**. Economists tend to be the dominant voices but the occasional sociologist, agronomist, pedagogue even anthropologist pops up.

But truly interdisciplinary works are very difficult to find – until now the most profound writer on the subject for me was [Robert Chambers](#) whose field is rural development and who encouraged a thoroughly local and participative approach to helping people help themselves..
But I have just come across an article [Helping People help themselves – toward a theory of autonomy](#), written 20 years ago by an adviser to ex-World Bank Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz,

which seems to me to get to the heart of the development conundrum. And the article duly led to a book [Helping People help themselves – from the World Bank to an alternative philosophy of technical assistance](#) ; David Ellerman (2006)

> If development is seen basically as autonomous self-development, then there is a subtle paradox or conundrum in the whole notion of development assistance: how can an outside party ("helper") assist those who are undertaking autonomous activities (the "doers") without overriding or undercutting their autonomy?
>
> How can a development agency actually help people help themselves as opposed to giving various forms of unhelpful help? The topic is related to the presumption in favour of inclusion, popular participation, involvement, and ownership as well as the suspicion that externally applied "carrots and sticks" do not "buy" sustainable policy changes.
>
> We cast a wide and vigorously multidisciplinary net to construct the intellectual background. Helping theory is approached by looking at the commonalties in quite different examples of relationships where one party, the "helper," is trying to help certain others, here called the "doers," to better help themselves. The target example of the helper-doer relationship is the relationship between a development agency and a client country but the theme is also explored in pedagogy, management theory, psychotherapy, community organization, and community education. The helper-doer relationships and prominent authors or "gurus" are (see Appendix for representative quotes):
> * Albert Hirschman on the relationship of a development advisor and a government,
> * E.F. Schumacher on the relationship between a development agency and a developing country,
> * Saul Alinsky on the relation of a community organizer to the community,
> * Paulo Freire on the relationship between an educator and a peasant (or urban poor) community,
> * S0ren Kierkegaard on the relation between a spiritual counsellor and a student,
> * John Dewey on the teacher-learner relationship,
> * Carl Rogers on the therapist-client relationship, and * Douglas McGregor on the (Theory Y) relationship between a manager and workers.

The argument is not that all these relationships are the same, but that there are commonalties when the party in the "helper" role acts so as to help the parties in the "doer" role to help themselves. The fact that such diverse thinkers in different fields arrive at interestingly similar conclusions increases our confidence in the common principles.

When I found myself in the 1990s working in the "capacity/institutional" development field in central Europe and central Asia, I noticed the relevance of texts in the development field but, equally, that attempts to draw lessons from that literature were strongly disparaged. "We're not down from the trees" was the attitude "our societies are highly educated". And indeed that was true, although every year in post-communism saw a significant deterioration in those educational standards! And what had been coping mechanisms to deal with the exigencies of communism soon turned into what the anthropologists recognised as "patrimonial" regimes where everything depended on "contacts".

To try to talk about this when the countries have been members of the European Union for 15 years is, of course, politically incorrect these days and therefore something which few political analysts will dare to attempt – one reason why I postpone that particular discussion to the next section.

But new EU member states have lost out from their self-denial of the benefits of the development literature which is why I attach this short list of references.

For those interested in pursuing the parallel

Pyramids of Sacrifice – political ethics and social change Peter Berger (1975) One of the first deconstructions of the field

The Development Dictionary W Sachs 2010 a marvellous radical critique of the hidden power relations in the subject

Deconstructing Development Discourse – buzzwords and fuzzwords (Oxfam 2010)

Development Aid confronts politics – the almost revolution; Tom Carothers (2013) Carothers is one of the best writers in the subject

Anthropology and development – a brief overview a short article

My take on capacity development

Capacity for Development (2002) A very typical book on the subject.

https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/DP-59B-Capacity-Change-Performance-Study-Report-2008.pdf

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261797277_Capacity_and_Capacity_Development_Coping_with_Complexity

https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2006-The-Concept-of-Capacity.pdf

Good Governance Revisited

"Good governance" may have been in the subtitle of my 1999 "In Transit" book - but it's a concept of which I've been not only sharply critical but downright dismissive.

The idea of a government which works for its people is an important one – so why have I not shown more enthusiasm for it? **Surely we all support such things as transparency, rule of law, accountability and effective public bodies – the notions that lie at the heart of "good governance"??**

My problem initially was that, in the 1990s, these were largely Western ideas (some of which very recent) which **we were imposing on non-Western nations and expecting them to imitate.** Furthermore, we ourselves have proved incapable of living up to these high standards – as an important post earlier this year set out.

Indeed **the expectations were so utopian** that a Harvard Professor proposed instead (in 2002) the principle of Good Enough Governance – which emphasised that **staging and prioritising** were needed in a process which would take some considerable time. Remember that, when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Ralf Dahrendorf had warned that it would take at least a generation for the Rule of Law to become properly embedded and enforced in ex-communist societies.

Thirty years later that's looking a shade optimistic!

And Merlilee Grindle followed up a few years later with Good Governance Revisited (2005) which is ALMOST the definitive paper for this discussion – particularly with its tables and diagram detailing the variety of issues and stages at stake….

My reservation stems from the fact that Grindle's paper focuses on what we used to call the "developing" nations and fails to recognise that the Eastern bloc of new EU member states still don't have fully legitimised systems of governance – she is, after all, more of a specialist in Latin American systems. Her **five-fold typology of government** – "collapsed", "personal rule", "minimally institutionalised", "institutionalised, non-competitive states" and "institutionalised, competitive states" – seems a bit crude to me and to need nuancing. Countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania need a category of their own.

For the moment, I offer some generalised comments on the difficulties all countries face in seeking to achieve better government. This, of course, begs the question of how many countries are genuinely seeking to improve their systems

Why progress toward Better Government is difficult

Key Principles	What it should mean	Reality
Accountability	Elections allow the electorate to get rid of governments pursuing unpopular policies Ministers take responsibility for departmental performance Government propose and oppositions dispute	Globalisation and neoliberalism have homogenised policies – "they're all the same" Noone resigns nowadays
Transparency	Those in power accept responsibility for their actions Mass media take their responsibilities for exposing misdeeds seriously	Public Relations cover up mistakes Media focuses now on spectacle Whistle-blowers prosecuted
Rule of Law	Noone is above the law Justice is neutral and judges fair-minded Money can't buy favours People obey the law	Various legal scandals have demonstrated judicial incompetence - and that justice commands a price. judges have been socialised into the elite and find it difficult to challenge their own – and in ex-communist countries belong to networks In countries like the USA even the basic issue of political succession is now open to doubt – with Republican voters and reps denying the validity of Biden's election and Republicans denying black voters their right to vote
Effective public institutions	Public bodies adequately funded Their performance measured and open to challenge Politicians propose and civil servants advise	Austerity programmes have weakened the efficacy of state bodies The traditional notion of civil service independence now questioned

You get the sense that the authorities are now embarrassed by the naivety they showed in the 1990s for believing that change was possible; that they have perhaps taken Grindle's advice too literally – at least as far as its application to themselves is concerned!

Improving our Lot

Let me try to summarise what I have been trying to say in the various posts I've written this year about subjects such as good governance, anti-corruption and helping people help themselves…..

- "Good governance" is an important concept
- which has suffered from its **patronising origins viz wanting to tell others what to do**
- and from the domination of the anti-corruption field by economists and political scientists
- Most anti-corruption strategies are not worth the paper they are written on. Most AC Boards are sinecures used to hide real misdeeds
- Every country needs **to take more seriously the question of how government can work better for its citizens**
- It is the sort of subject which could be tackled by a Citizen's Jury – but only after municipalities have satisfactorily demonstrated the potential of that device.
- Until that happens, **social scientists and others should be cooperating in each country to summarise the various reports** on improving the style and machinery of government already produced and to formulate practical propositions which could be used in such initiatives
- On the basis, however, that **only a consensual approach** can help break down the high level of distrust which exists everywhere about government. **Unilateral, top-down injunctions don't work**…
- Accountability, effective public bodies, rule of law and transparency are **not exactly the sort of words and phrases calculated to inspire people**
- The approach to change **needs to be "sexier"**

And I'm not sure if "Happiness" is the silver bullet. I've just finished reading a little Pelican book "Can We Be Happier? Evidence and Ethics" by Richard Layard (2020) who was New Labour's Happiness Tsar (clicking the title will give you a good summary by the author). I enjoyed the book – although others were deeply sceptical.

It is NOT one of these self-help books but very much directed at the sort of policy-makers who were persuaded in the early part of the millennium that the measurement of social progress needed to go beyond reliance on growth rates. Joseph Stiglitz has been one of the key figures in this development. Various countries – including Bhutan, New Zealand and Scotland - have been sufficiently persuaded to set up special programmes…although "wellbeing" is often the word used rather than "happiness"

One of the interesting features of Layard's book is that half of it consists of a consideration of how its basic message might be applied by a range of people – including health professionals, teachers, communities, scientists, economists, politicians and public servants. I was sad to see that the section on politicians and public managers contains none of the references I might have expected to see on the good government literature eg Bo Rothstein or Merilee Grindle..

Effective Government still a work in progress

*If the relevance of research in political science is understood as how it may improve human well-being and/or political legitimacy, **research has to a large extent been focusing on the least important part of the political system**, namely, how 'access to power' is organized (i.e. electoral and representative democracy and processes of democratization).*
*This focus on elections, democratization processes and party **systems ignores what we consider to be the more important part of the state machinery for increasing human well-being**, namely, how power is exercised or, in other words, the quality of how the state manages to govern society (Bo Rothstein 2011).*

In the autumn of 1990, I made a fateful trip across the North Sea to take up a short-term assignment in Copenhagen with the World Health Organisation to help its Head of Public Health map out strategic options for what were then regarded as "the newly independent states" of central and eastern Europe. The difficulties these countries faced in their "transition" to a "better" state were soon reflected in the literature of "transitology", "democratization" and of "capacity development".

One of the many fields into which my new line of work took me was that of "corruption" – which the academics made typically complex by designating it, variously, "particularism", clientilism or "patrimonialism". Bo Rothstein is one of the best analysts in the field and explains in the linked **article that the very word wasn't acceptable until the early 1990s – after which it became** essentially a stick with which to beat nations judged to be inferior.

The European Union and Commission bear a particular responsibility for first pushing **privatization on the countries** seeking membership of the Union; and then **corrupting their new institutions with tens of billions of European Regional Funding.**

This may initially have had the elites licking their lips – but the scale of the bureaucracy required to access the goodies and the subsequent monitoring and fraud investigations has now made this a much less attractive proposition.

The use of these funds were recently analysed in painstaking detail in "Europe's Burden - promoting good governance across. borders" by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2019) And here's another (less famous) Romanian's contribution to the discussion - From corruption to modernity S Vaduva (2016)

Of course, "it takes two to tango" – and I'm not disputing the need for effective anti-corruption strategies in these countries - but there **is too much rhetoric and lip-service evident in the way this work is carried out.** The sources of the wealth which seduces and corrupts are **Western** – those who are presented with the opportunities are Bulgarian, Czech, Greeks, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak leaders and officials.

And the corruption is not just systemic but moral and, thanks to the European Union, has seeped into the very bloodstream of society. The average monthly pension and wage in Bulgaria and Romania is just over 300 euros but their judges, generals and MEPs earn European levels of 10,000 euros or so - with a cascading effect on senior salaries. And then they wonder why the societies are so totally alienated!

Anti-Corruption – the Great Game no more

> **Law**; "the spider's webs which, if anything small falls into them ensnare it, but large things break through and escape". Solon

Other societies and their cultures are strange – so we invent stories to help us understand their behavior. Thus the French are argumentative and the Germans methodical…Some people indeed have made careers from explaining local behaviour to visitors eg Geert de Hodstede, Richard Lewis and Frans Trompenaars.

Add in some **scandal and wrongdoing** and you have **a full-scale industry – which is what the field of anti-corruption has become** in the past 30 years. This post is my attempt as an outsider to offer an overview of that literature….

When, in the late 1990s, I first noticed this development, my judgement was that the "best practice" being offered was very much what the sociologists, rather euphemistically, call "an ideal type" ie a version of reality one rarely finds in practice. This is what I wrote at the time –

> *A lot of what the global community preaches as "good practice" in government structures is actually of very recent vintage in their own countries and is still often more rhetoric than actual practice.*
> *Of course public appointments, for example, should be made on merit – and not on the basis of family, ethnic or religious networks. But civil service appointments and structures in **Belgium** and **Netherlands**, to name but two European examples, were – until very recently – influenced by religious and party considerations. In those cases a system which is otherwise rule-based and transparent has had minor adjustments made to take account of strong social realities and ensure consensus.*
>
> *But in the case of countries such **as Northern Ireland** (until recently) the form and rhetoric of objective administration in the public good had been completely undermined by religious divisions. All public goods (eg housing and appointments) were, until the end of the 20th century, made in favour of Protestants.*
> ***The Italian system** has for decades been notorious for the systemic abuse of the machinery of the state by various powerful groups – with eventually the Mafia itself clearly controlling some key parts of it. American influence played a powerful part in sustaining this in the post-war period – but the collapse of communism removed that influence and has allowed the Italians to have a serious attempt at reforming the system. At least for a few years – before Berlusconi scuppered it all (Lane) A British academic recently described its continuing role in the country -*
>
> > *To have a career in an Italian university you have to be attached to a senior professor, usually a man, usually of a certain age. These immensely powerful figures are known as baroni – 'barons'. They can be on the left or the right. All posts and other privileges pass through the baroni. Without a barone on your side, you may as well pack it in. University posts are generally filled by means of a public competition – a concorso – which is open to anyone with the right qualifications. In practice, concorsi are usually fixed. They are designed for one person, usually an internal candidate who has been waiting for this particular concorso for years. The new researcher or lecturer owes his or her job to the barone, and will remain loyal to them. With time and luck, the new appointees might become baroni themselves. The mismatch between formal rules and their application is characteristic of Italy. These networks of power and patronage have been studied by anthropologists: in some faculties at the University of Bari, for example, networks of family*

and kinship relationships stretch back generations. Disputes and divisions are often focused around key baroni. In one university two separate but essentially identical departments were created around two highly powerful and influential scholars.

……Can these institutions be changed? From time to time there will be scandals, arrests, investigations into cases. But they always come to nothing. The rules have not been broken. The unwritten ones have been followed. Favouritism and the exercise of power aren't illegal, or can't be proved so. This is as true in the UK as it is in Italy. I have seen eminent professors in this country push their own students time and time again on grant or appointment panels.

These are well-known cases – but the more we look, the more we find that countries which have long boasted of their fair and objective public administration systems have in fact suffered serious intrusions by sectional interests.

The British and French indeed have invented words to describe the informal systems which perverted the apparent neutrality and openness of their public administration – the "old boy network" which was still the basis of the senior civil service in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s a century after the first major reform. And the elitist and closed nature of the [French ENArque system](#) has, in the new millennium, become the subject of heated debate in that country.

In many countries, local government appointments systems were, until very recently, strongly politicised - and it is clear that national european systems are becoming more politicised. This trend was started by Margaret Thatcher who simply did not trust the senior civil service to do what she needed. She brought in individuals who had proved their worth in the private sector and came into government service for a limited period of time (sometimes part-time and unpaid) to do a specific task which the Minister or Prime Minister judged the civil servants to be incapable of doing.

Her critique of the UK Civil Service was twofold – first that those at the top were so balanced and objective in their advice that they lacked the appetite to help lead and implement the changes she considered British society needed; and second that those further down the ladder lacked the management skills necessary to manage public services. The Labour Government since 1997 inherited a civil service they considered somewhat contaminated by 18 years of such dominant political government – and had more than 200 such political appointees. Such trends are very worrying for the civil service which has lost the influence and constraining force they once had.

Conclusion

Too much of the commentary of international bodies on transition countries seems oblivious to this history and these realities – and imagines that a mixture of persuasive rhetoric and arm-twisting can lead to relevant, rapid and significant changes. *A bit more humility is needed – and more thought about the realistic trajectory of change. To recognize this is not, however, to condone a system of recruitment by connections – "people we know". Celebration of cultural differences can sometimes be used to legitimize practices which undermine social coherence and organizational effectiveness. And the acid test of a State body is whether the public thinks they are getting good public services delivered in an acceptable way!*

The two decades since then have seen national reputations for integrity challenged – the British judicial system, for example, took a battering after a [series of revelations of judicial cockups](#) and its [policing has always been suspect](#). But it was 2015 before a book with the title "How Corrupt is Britain?" Ed by D Whyte appeared – followed a few years later by "Democracy for Sale - dark money and dirty politics"; by Peter Geoghegan (2020).

For the moment, it's the new EU member states I want to focus on. Ralf Dahrendorf was probably the first to suggest (in 1990) that it would take the newly **independent states of central and eastern Europe** at least two generations to develop full Rule of Law and a properly functioning civil society.

I vividly remember in the mid-1990s the EU's first Ambassador to Romania (Karen Fogg) giving every visiting consultant such as me a copy of a review of Robert Putnam's "Making Democracy Work" (1993) which contrasted northern and southern Italy and suggested that the latter's emphasis on family connections put it several centuries behind the north (This little article in the current copy of LRB would suggest that was an overoptimistic interpretation of the North!)

This is the same Robert Putnam who coined the concept of "social capital" which was taken up with great enthusiasm for a decade or so by the World Bank and academics but is critically assessed here. Putnam's book was based on an earlier work by an older American political scientist – Edward Banfield – who had, with his Italian wife, spent two years in the mid 1950s in a small Italian village in the south and subsequently produced a famous book "The Moral Basis of a Backward Society" (1958) which fixed the peculiarities of Italian society in the popular mind – until the Godfather films came along. "The never-ending debate about the moral basis of a backward society" is an excellent 2009 article by Emiliane Ferragina which explored the influence of such books.

The first wave of enthusiasm, in global bodies and academia alike, for anti-corruption (or "good governance" as the concept was more diplomatically called) strategies ended in the new millennium – when a note of realism became evident. It was at that stage that I realized that some of the best analyses were coming from the anthropologists

Background reading

Fighting Systemic Corruption – the indirect strategy Bo Rothstein 2018 a typically thoughtful approach from one of the key (Swedish) analysts of government systems

Making Sense of Corruption; Bo Rothstein (2017) one of the clearest expositions

Unaccountable – how anti-corruption watchdogs and lobbyists sabotaged america's finance, freedom and security ; J Wedel (2016) another anthropologist

Jobs for the Boys - patronage and th state in comparative perspective Merilee Grindle (2012) A book in which Grindle analyses the situation in 4 Latin American countries

Confronting Corruption, building accountability – lessons from the world of international development advising L Dumas, J Wedel and G Callman (2010)

Syndromes of corruption – wealth, power and democracy Michael Johnson (2005) An American political scientist who has been involved with the Transparency International work does good comparative work here

Corruption – anthropological perspectives edited by D Haller and C Shore (2005) quite excellent collection of case studies

Shifting obsessions – 3 essays on the politics of anti-corruption Ivan Krastev (2004) Bulgarian political scientist exposes the hypocrisy behind the rhetoric

https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/edward-banfield-revisited

https://contemporarythinkers.org/edward-banfield/introduction/

https://edwardcbanfield.wordpress.com/2015/09/10/edward-c-banfield-on-corruption-as-a-feature-of-governmental-organization/

Trust and Covid Gerry Stoker

https://www.edelman.com/20yearsoftrust/

http://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm

Open democracy on Sarkozy

In Transit

One of the books of which I'm most proud is In Transit – notes on good governance which I drafted in 1998 - after almost a decade of experience of working and living in Czechia, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Latvia on projects building, we hoped, more open institutions of local government and regional development. I had come to that work in 1990 after 20 years of trying to get our Scottish system operating in a more citizen-friendly way – so I felt I knew what people in central Europe were up against.

The book was, unusually, written very much for the younger generation in those parts of central Europe and central Asia I was working with; picking out the key features of the new systems they were being asked to run; and tried to identify some pointers for how to effect change in local and central government state bodies. I remain pretty satisfied with the book – although I might have made a better link between the case study of strategy work in Scotland and the rest of the book

In the early days of what used to be called "transition", people sometimes asked me what, as a western consultant, I could bring to the task of crafting state bodies in the countries of the old soviet bloc. **They didn't realise that, in many respects, Scotland was, until the 80s and 90s, culturally and institutionally, more socialist than countries such as Hungary.** The scale of municipal power was particularly comprehensive in Scotland where the local council still owned three quarters of the housing stock, 90% of education and most of the local services - including buses. Only health and social security escaped its control: these were handled by Central Government.

Local government simply could not cope with such massive responsibilities (although such a view was rejected at the time). This was particularly evident in the larger housing estates in the West of Scotland which had been built for low-income "slum" dwellers in the immediate post-war period -

- there were few services in these areas
- employment was insecure
- schools in such areas had poor educational achievement and were not attractive to teachers/head-masters
- local government officials treated their staff in a dictatorial way
- who in turn treated the public with disdain

The contemptuous treatment given by local council services seemed to squash whatever initiative people from such areas had. They learned to accept second-class services. Behind this lay working and other conditions so familiar to people in Central Europe

- the culture was one of waiting for orders from above. There were few small businesses since the Scots middle class have tended to go into the professions rather than setting up one's own business
- work was in large industrial plants
- for whose products there was declining demand
- rising or insecure unemployment
- monopolistic provision of local public services

- and hence underfunding of services - queues and insensitive provision
- hostility to initiatives, particularly those from outside the official system.
- elements of a "one-party state" (the Labour party has controlled most of local government in Scotland for several decades).

I'm thinking now of updating the "In Transit" book but thought it would be useful first to plot how western and eastern European authors have deal generally with developments in their respective parts of Europe.

How authors from Eastern and Western Europe have tried to make sense of each other's societies developments since 1990

	Western Europe **authors**	**Eastern** Europe **authors**
On **Western** Europe changes	A lot of Western European writers have covered developments in West Europe since 1990 eg Empire of Democracy – the remaking of the West since the Cold War 1971-2017 by Simon Reid-Hendry (2019)	Ivan Krastev – "After Europe" (2017) Bulgaria's best-known intellectual argues that the democratic ideals that were promoted beyond Europe's borders have now been undercut within the European polity itself. Ryszgard Legutko – a right-wing Polish philosopher argues in The Demon in Democracy – totalitarian temptations in free societies (2016) that the more the cause of liberal-democratic equality progresses, the more indignantly the remaining instances of inequality are felt. Thus "equality resembles a monster with an insatiable appetite: regardless of how much it has eaten, the more it devours, the hungrier it becomes." I would be interested to hear about other publications
On **Eastern** Europe changes	The Great Rebirth – lessons from the victory of capitalism over communism ; Anders Aslud and Simeon Djankov (2015) which is one of the very few books which tells the story from the view point of some of the key actors in most of the eastern countries at the time – with all the strengths and weaknesses that genre involves although most historians find it easier to focus on individual countries, From peoples into nations – a history of Eastern Europe; by John Connelly (2020) reviewed here and with an interview here. Aftershock – a journey into Eastern Europe's Forgotten Dreams 2017) is based on interviews with people the author, young American journalist John Feffer, met in the early 90s and then, 25 years later, went back to interview. The interviews can actually be accessed here	Ivan Krastev and S Holmes – "The Light that Failed – a reckoning" (2019) which is one of the few books to assess how Eastern Europe has fared after 30 years. Alina Mungiu-Pippidi - Europe's Burden - promoting good governance across. borders" (2019) which looks at the nature and impact of European technical assistance on the development of institutional capacity in central europe and "Neighbourhood" countries SO NOT All THAT MANY COVERING THE REGION AS A WHOLE But many East European social scientists and journalists have covered their own countries eg Vladimir Tismaneanu and Marius Stan - Romania Confronts Its Communist Past:

	SO NOT MANY ¬ As Romania is the country I know best, I have selected a few texts which throw light on that country's development - Romania Redivivus; Alex Clapp (NLR 2017) - Robert Kaplan - In Europe's Shadow – two cold wars and a thirty-year journey through Romania and beyond; (2016) a fascinating book by an American journalist who has had a soft spot for Romania since the beginning of his career. Great breadth of reading - Tom Gallagher - Romania and the European Union – how the weak vanquished the strong; (2009) great narrative by a Scottish historian; and Theft of a Nation – Romania since Communism (2005) powerful critique – Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey Ronald Young (2014)	Democracy, Memory, and Moral Justice (2018) – both Romanians. The first who left Romania in the 1980s and returned briefly in the early 2000s to chair a Presidential commission into the impact of communism on the country, the second who still works in Romania. The book is a very personal take on how that Presidential Commission fared. Cornel Ban - Ruling Ideas – how global neoliberalism goes local (2016) a left-wing Romanian critique of how neoliberalism got its grip on countries such as Romania and Spain Romania – borderland of Europe; Lucian Boia (2001) Very readable and well translated study by a Romanian historian

The Pygmies take over - Balance of Power Changes

It's not so easy to have a serious discussion about power since those who are paid to consider (academics) have carved up the market so that **political scientists** focus only on what they call "Politico-administrative relations"; and **sociologists** on those with economic or (these days) financial power. Since **economists**, for their part, won't even talk about power they are left to focus on "the market" - although even they have to concede that it often displays "oligopolistic" tendencies

In the absence of the academics, journalists (and Marxists) are about the only people left willing and able to analyse power. In Britain, for example, that means a brave, few writers such as Owen Jones ("The Establishment"), Peter Oborne ("The Triumph of the Political Class"), Frederic Mount ("The New Few"), Stuart Weir (the annual Democratic Audit), John Foster, Susan George or Susan Watkins

My experience before and after 1990 operating in the no-man's land between the political system and the bureaucracy **places me firmly in the political science category** – although I have great respect for what journalists, historians, anthropologists let alone political economists such as Mark Blyth bring to the feast

Initially I belonged to the school which felt that the bureaucracy had too much power.

A combination of Thatcher, "Yes, Minister" and New Labour saw things swing back to the political system. More recently, the technocrats seemed to have wrested power back – only for Trump and Brexit to remind us that "the people" also have a voice.

The grand old man of this field is B Guy Peters whose The Politics of Bureaucracy first came out in the 1970s, is now in its 5th edition and is considered the bible on this issue. He has been an inspiration and active presence since 1990 in the network of schools of public administration in central and eastern Europe (NISPAcee) – Politico-Administrative Relations – Who Rules? (2001) very much showing his influence.

That this is still an important issue in the region is evident from recent publications such as [The Principles of Public Administration](#) produced by SIGMA (OECD) in 2016 and [Quality of Public Administration – a toolbox for practitioners](#) (EU 2017).

However, a lot of what the global community preaches as "good practice" in government structures is actually of very recent vintage in their own countries and is still often more rhetoric than actual practice (see post on Anti-Corruption)

It is clear that national european systems are becoming more politicised. This trend was started by Margaret Thatcher who simply did not trust the senior civil service to do what she needed. She brought in individuals who had proved their worth in the private sector and came into government service for a limited period of time (sometimes part-time and unpaid) to do a specific task which the Minister or Prime Minister judged the civil servants to be incapable of doing. Her critique of the UK Civil Service was twofold –
- first that those at the top were so balanced and objective in their advice that they lacked the appetite to help lead and implement the changes she considered British society needed; and
- second that those further down the ladder lacked the management skills necessary to manage public services. The Labour Government since 1997 inherited a civil service they considered somewhat contaminated by 18 years of such dominant political government – and had more than 200 political appointees.

Such trends are very worrying for the civil service which has lost the influence and constraining force they once had.

The two decades since then have seen national reputations for integrity challenged – the British judicial system, for example, took a battering after a [series of revelations of judicial cockups](#) and its [policing has always been suspect](#). But it was 2015 before a book with the title "How Corrupt is Britain?" ed by D Whyte appeared – followed a few years later by "Democracy for Sale - dark money and dirty politics"; by Peter Geoghegan (2020).

Bulgaria flies under the radar

Bulgaria may be a popular holiday destination – for both snow AND sand – but remains a bit of a mystery for Europeans, not least for its Cyrillic language. **Its citizens go to the polls today in the third attempt this year the country has made to find a government which can actually govern**

Is neighbour, Romania, with whom it joined the EU in 2007 has more of a profile on corruption - but **both are laggards on that and judicial reform**. Bulgaria has simply managed to fly under everyone's radar - for reasons perhaps not unconnected with Boyko Borrisov's cultivation of Angela Merkel and her [EPP grouping](#) in his long rule from 2009 to earlier this year. And, perhaps, with Hungary and Poland to worry about and some political scalps to show in Romania, Brussels didn't want to make any more enemies.

Given the importance the EU has given in the last two years to the Rule of Law Mechanism, its curious that they appointed a Romanian to head [the new office of European Prosecutor](#)

Perhaps they felt that [Laura Kovesi](#) falling foul of the Romanian government was proof of the effectiveness of her 12-year spell as Romania's head Prosecutor. She certainly managed to put enough politicians behind bars – something which Bulgaria never managed to do.

But the **notorious Securitate remains as strong as ever in the country and it is clear that Kovesi colluded with them to bring down both politicians and judges** who did not act in appropriate ways. I wrote [about this almost 5 years ago](#) and was somewhat critical of an American report called [Fighting Corruption with Con Tricks – Romania's Assault on the Rule of Law](#) – but had, ultimately, to agree with their criticisms.

Both Bulgaria and Romania have [dubious reputations with the European Court of Human Rights](#) which has thrown out many of the cases the two countries have brought to them – for failure to observe "due process"

So the release into the public domain, in all the languages of the EU, of documentation from governments, Civil Society and the European Commission about the state of the rule of law is a highly welcome development. It certainly lifts the veil on Bulgarian practices – particularly with the release last weekend of the 100 page report [Binding the Guardians](#) from Albena Azmanova about the situation in France, Spain and Bulgaria.

But it is the Bulgarian section I want to focus on in the rest of this post – which [can be separately read here](#) (only 34 pages).

Let me remind you of two things

    1. **The scope of the European Commission's exploration** of the Rule of Law

Four fields are the focus of the Commission investigations:

- the justice system,
- the anti-corruption framework,
- media freedom, and
- 'other institutional checks and balances'.

Azmanova rightly criticises the absence of interest in the operation of the rule of law in the private sector – the analysis being limited to the operations of the public sector. But I was delighted to see that the critical question of the ownership structure of the media is central to the investigations. The power of the corporate media is a scandal to democracy.

    2. **Four tests are suggested by Azmanova for the Commission's work** -

We suggest that, in order to effectively comply with the rule of law while conducting its annual rule of law surveys, the **Commission needs to be guided by (at least) four norms**:

- clarity of communication,
- thoroughness in addressing rule of law violations (that is, in the full range and depth of detail),
- equal treatment of the subjects of power, and
- impartiality in the use of power (in the sense of not having a narrow partisan-political agenda).

Obscurity is a fertile ground for arbitrariness, omissions tacitly condone what is omitted, favoritism disempowers some, and partisan-political considerations harm the common good.

These excerpts give a reasonable sense of the report

The overarching problem is that political forces are using the justice system, including reforms purportedly aiming at fighting corruption, to complete the state capture by the oligarchic mafia.

A Specialised Prosecution, a Specialised Appeals Court, and the Anticorruption Commission have recently been set up - with an attendant 'specialised' committee dealing with a pre-trial confiscation of property in cases of suspected corruption (the Counter-Corruption and Unlawfully Acquired Assets Forfeiture Commission).
These have been set up via 'extraordinary' legislation by Parliament. In their area of competence, these courts have enhanced powers that lie outside of the normal legal system. As Evgenni Dainov noted in a 2018 letter to Justice Commissioner Věra Jourová, those implicated within the system of specialised courts do not have recourse to the normal institutions of law and order and thus do not profit from due process (Dainov 2018).
As of December 2018, new legislation specifically allows the Confiscation Commission to hold on to confiscated property - even after a court declares the person innocent.
Several case-studies are given in Azmanova's report - one bringing to light the logic at work in fighting graft and corruption in Bulgaria: the victims of corruption are punished while the perpetrators, usually well-connected political figures, run free.

But Lozan Panov, the President of the Supreme Court of Cassation says that "the rule of law and the division of powers are highly compromised and key state institutions have been captured by private interests [...] At the same time real corruption remains unchecked and pervasive. Those who are independent from power are under constant attack. Lists of 'enemies' and 'traitors' are published in newspapers. Xenophobia and hatred have become a government policy"

The 2020 EC Report, in its commentary on the anti-corruption framework, mentions "the complex and formalistic Bulgarian system of criminal procedural law has been highlighted by different reports and analyses over the years as an obstacle to the effective investigation and prosecution of high-level corruption" — but refrains from addressing the arbitrary power of the specialized prosecution system.
The politicisation of the judiciary in Bulgaria is endemic and pervasive. Appointments are commonly based on personal relationships and deals rather than professional merit and application of established procedures.
The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) is responsible for the appointment and promotion of all magistrates (investigators, prosecutors and judges) as well as for monitoring their ethics. A Constitutional reform in 2015 introduced a system of appointments to this body that invites political influence over the judiciary. Thus, eleven of the SJC's twenty-five members are directly elected by Bulgaria's Parliament—appointments conducive to political influence. Moreover, the four prosecutors and one investigator who are elected to the SJC are direct subordinates of the Prosecutor General, who is an automatic member of the SJC. This is problematic because all prosecutors are under the direct control of the Prosecutor General, while the Prosecution is strongly influenced by the executive

The European Commission comments on the deficient independence of the SJC by noting that
- The overall number of judges elected by their peers does not amount to a majority;
- the Prosecutor General plays a decisive role in the Prosecutor's chamber as well as an influence on the plenary and potentially the Judges' chamber;

- the "overall structure of the SJC would limit its ability to safeguard judicial independence against pressure by the executive, the legislative, the judiciary, including the office of the PG";
- The lack of judicial independence is evidenced by the number of judges subject to attacks and criticism on their rulings (2020: 6-7).

However, deprived of proper diagnosis, and with a congratulatory reference to the Constitutional reform of 2015 which in fact deepened the SJC's dependence on political forces, the Report treats the issue only superficially, as a matter of incidents, rather than as a systemic problem.

Some of the structural issues within the SJC are acknowledged in the Report, but they are framed in a way to convey the government's commitment to reforms and create the impression of progress amidst a reality of 'backsliding'—that is, of deliberate and systematic assault on the rule of law by the dominant political forces in Bulgaria. The incidents we reviewed above, however, and which had been communicated to the Commission by external stakeholders are not referenced;
neither is criticism included on the amendments to the Constitution of Bulgaria in 2015 which have been contested as having effectively decreased the independence of the SJC (Venice Commission 2015).
Thus, while the Report effectively addresses some of the problems and refers to Council of Europe recommendations, the criticism is framed in terms of incomplete reforms and lack of sufficient resources, not as a lack of political will to undertake the requested reforms.
Legal expert Radosveta Vassileva also points out that the Reports omit several spending scandals that have occurred within the office.
Bulgaria has a long troublesome track record of losing cases before the ECHR because of severe violations by the Prosecutor's Office and this has also been omitted in the Report

Trouble Ahead

Like an underwater volcano, a big issue has been simmering away for some time and arguably showed its first sign of life with the judgement a few weeks ago of the Polish Supreme Court that Polish law trumps European. The issue is the power and legitimacy of the European Court of Justice.
We are told that, in these days of pooled sovereignty in matters, for example, of trade and defence, the question of national sovereignty is of marginal significance - if not an outdated notion. But here I agree very much with the picture painted by the philosopher [John Gray who used to be on the right but is now in charge of book reviews](#) in the leftist "The New Statesman"

Brexit was a revolt against globalisation. Asserting the state against the global market is in Brexit's DNA. Thatcherites swallowed a mythical picture of the European Union as being hostile to the free market—the same picture that befuddles much of the left.
In reality the EU is now a neoliberal project. Immune to the meddlesome interventions of democratically accountable national governments, a continent-wide single market in labour and goods is hardwired to preclude socialism and undermine social democracy.

Large numbers of voters in the UK favour nationalising public utilities and firms such as the Tata steel plant while supporting stiffer penalties for law-breakers and strict border controls. "Left-wing" economics and "right wing" policies on crime and immigration are not at odds. Both come from a concern with social cohesion. If there is a centre ground in British politics, this is it.

Old Labour occupied much of this space. But it is almost unthinkable that any senior Labour figure should attempt to do so nowadays.

Almost a year ago, no less a figure than Perry Anderson trained his large cannon on the technocratic core of the European Union – with a trilogy of essays amounting to a full-size book - starting with a 20,000 word essay entitled [The European Coup](#) followed by [Ever Closer Union](#) The second of these looks at the origins and practices of the different institutions within the European Union – arguing powerfully that they breach every principle of the rule of law. A [useful summary is here](#).

And, this week, another major figure – German Wolfgang Streeck in a [short article for Brave New Europe](#) – has applied that general critique to the EU's handling of the challenge from Hungary and Poland. It's an explosive article – which starts thus

> *Strange things are happening in Brussels, and getting stranger by the day. The European Union (EU), a potential superstate beholden to a staggering democratic deficit, is preparing to punish two of its democratic member states and their elected governments, along with the citizens who elected them, for what it considers a democratic deficit.*
> *For its part, the EU is governed by an unelected technocracy, by a constitution devoid of people and consisting of a series of unintelligible international treaties, by rulings handed down by an international court, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), as well as by a parliament that is not allowed to legislate and knows no opposition. **Moreover, treaties cannot be reviewed in practice and rulings can only be reviewed by the Court itself.***
>
> *The current issue is an old one, but it has long been avoided, in the best tradition of the European Union, so as not to wake sleeping dogs. To what extent does "European" law, made by national governments meeting behind closed doors in the European Council and elaborated in the secret chambers of the ECJU, trump national law passed by the democratic member states of the European Union? The answer seems obvious to simple minds unversed in EU affairs: where, and only where, the member states, in accordance with the terms of the Treaties (written with a capital T in Brussels presumably to indicate their sublime nature), have conferred on the EU the right to legislate in a way that is binding on all of them…..*

It was a young Netherlands historian – Luuk van Middelaar (speechwriter for a few tears of the EU's first elected President von Rompuy) – who let the cat out of the bag in [The Passage to Europe](#) (2013) about what he called the "coup" that gave the European Court of Justice its supreme powers in the 1960s. And that was indeed the starting point for Anderson's essay on [The European Coup](#). Streeck's article continues -

> *Already in the early 1960s the CJEU discovered in the Treaties the general supremacy of EU law over national law. Note at a glance that nothing similar is to be found in the Treaties; one needs to be a member of the Court to observe that supremacy. At first, insofar as the jurisdiction of the European Union was still very limited, nobody seemed to care about this. Subsequently, however, as the European Union set about opening up national economies to the 'four freedoms' of the single market and then introducing the common currency, the doctrine of the primacy of European law operated as an effective device for extending the Union's authority without the need to rewrite the Treaties, especially as this became increasingly difficult with the increase in Member States from six to, pre-*

Brexit, 28.
What was initially no more than a highly selective upward transfer of national sovereignty gradually became the main institutional driver for what was termed 'integration by right', which was carried out by the Union's central authorities and co-administered by various coalitions of member states and governments.

Streeck then moves on to make the same point as Albena Azmanova does in last weekend's [Binding the Guardians](#) report which I've discussed in the most recent posts – namely that a lot of EU countries are in breach of the rule of law.

As far as corruption is concerned, Poland is generally considered a clean country (Hungary less so), while countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia and Malta are widely known as bastions of business cronyism and venality, not to mention, in some cases, the deep-rooted mistreatment of their minorities.
Indeed, both Slovakia and Malta have recently witnessed the murder of independent journalists, perpetrated by criminal groups connected to their respective government circles, involved in investigations related to cases of high-level corruption. **Yet no one threatens to cut off European subsidies to these countries, while the liberal European press carefully refrains from comparing the Polish or Hungarian "rule of law" with those of Slovakia and Malta.**
There is reason to believe that this is the case because, **unlike Poland and Hungary**, *both countries pay back by always voting in favour of the European Commission and otherwise keeping their mouths shut. Similarly, political influence over the high courts of a given country is something that EU bodies have good reason not to make too much of a fuss about: where Constitutional Courts exist, they are all without exception and in one way or another politicised.*

Michel Barnier shocked everyone when he put a marker down for French sovereignty which Streeck suggests could help put an end to the relentless push for European integration

The battle in Poland and Hungary may put an end to the era in which "integration by right", thanks to its incrementalism, could be treated by increasingly short-sighted national governments with benevolent neglect. For example, some centrist French politicians set to contest next year's presidential elections, such as Valérié Pécresse (Les Republicaines), Arnaud Montebourg (ex-Socialist) and even Michel Barnier, the combative Brexit negotiator, have begun to show their concern for what they now call French "legal sovereignty", with some of them, including surprisingly the latter, demanding a national referendum to establish once and for all the supremacy of French law over European law.

And Streeck concludes with an interesting comment on the real purpose behind the multi billion EC Recovery Fund

The real purpose of the recovery fund – to keep national elites in power in Eastern Europe committed to the internal market and averse to any kind of alliance with Russia or China – is too sensitive to talk about in public. *So it must be shown that money buys something higher than imperial stability: submission to Western European cultural leadership as documented by the selection of leaders to the taste of its elites.*
Will Poland and Hungary learn to behave like Romania or Bulgaria, or even like Malta and Slovakia, and thus placate their enemies in Brussels? If they refuse to do so and the CJEU has the last word, another moment of truth may present itself, this time with an Eastern twist.

*Merkel, during her final hours as chancellor, urged the EU to exercise restraint and try a political rather than a legal solution. (**Merkel may well have been informed by the United States that it would not look kindly on Poland, its strongest and most loyal anti-Russian ally in Eastern Europe, leaving the EU, where it is fed by the EU so that it can be armed by the US power**).*
In this context, note that there now seems to be a slow realisation in other member states of the sheer presumptuousness of the EU's increasingly explicit insistence on the general primacy of its law over that of its member states.

Inconclusion

Some ten years ago I presented a paper at the Black Sea resort of Varna to the NISPAcee annual Conference (Network of Institutes and Schools of Public Admin in central and eastern Europe) which **asked whether senior politicians in the Region actually wanted reform….**
The paper was called "The Long Game – not the logframe" and exposed the superficiality of the assumptions EC bureaucrats seemed to be making in its Technical Assistance programmes about what I called the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" which prevailed in most ex-communist countries. The paper

- argued that the variety of terms used to try to describe the nature of the regimes which control both the countries targeted by the EC's Neighbourhood Policy and wider afield indicate both the analytical problems in understanding the structure of power; and, therefore, in developing appropriate tools of intervention
- suggested the term "impervious" regime as a useful description of an all-too common system which can ride rough-shod over its subjects' concerns in the pursuit of its own selfish goals
- asked what we expect administrative reform to deliver in such systems
- questioned the efficacy of the tools which international bodies favour for administrative reform in such contexts
- looked briefly at the (scanty) literature reflecting on the outcome of these interventions
- explored the concept of "windows of opportunity"
- concluded that technical assistance is built on shaky foundations
- not least in relation to the knowledge base of westerners and their sensitivity to context

The tools which transition countries were being asked to use to get a system of public administration more responsive to public need[1] included –

- *Judicial reform*; to embed properly the principle of the rule of law[2]
- *Budgetary reform*; to ensure the integrity and transparency of public resources
- *Civil service laws, structures and training institutions* – to encourage professionalism and less politicization of staff of state bodies
- *Impact assessment* – to try to move the transition systems away from a legalistic approach and force policy-makers to carry out consultations and assess the financial and other effects of draft legislation

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[1] The Governance and Social Development Resource Centre published in 2011 an interesting overview of "Current trends in governance support"- at http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD755.pdf
[2] see http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Rule_of_Law_Temptations.pdf

- *Functional Review* – to try to remove those functions of state bodies which are no longer necessary or are best handled by another sector or body[3].
- *Institutional twinning* – to help build the capacity of those state bodies whose performance is crucial to the implementation of the Acquis Communautaire
- *Development of local government and NGOs* – to try to ensure that a redistribution of power takes place
- *Anti-corruption strategies*[4] – which incorporate elements of the first three of the above
- *Performance measurement and management eg EFQM*
- *report-cards*[5] -

Needless to say, my paper went down like a lead balloon. My audience, after all, were the directors and teachers of central European schools of public administration – and **I was asking them to take on the additional task of networking with politicians to persuade them of the need for change!**

Seven years later a [small but astonishing report was submitted to the EC](#) as part of an EC-funded programme which **stated quite baldly that very little was known about the way public administration was organised in the Region** – but broadly confirming the tenor of my paper
At the same time, the EC, World Bank and OECD were producing Manuals such as [Quality of Public Administration – toolbox for practitioners](#) (EC 2017 edition) and [Principles of Public Administration](#) (SIGMA 2018) to make sure that new and aspiring member states properly understood what was expected of them. A somewhat **belated recognition that several states had been allowed to join the European Union before they had actually achieved the relevant capacity** – not just in the contentious judicial field but in basic aspects of good government.
The SIGMA guidelines, for example, state that

> *Modern public service is regarded as possible only when a set of conditions is in place that ensures:*
> - *separation between the public and private spheres;*
> - *separation between politics and administration;*
> - *individual accountability of public servants;*
> - *sufficient job protection, levels of pay and stability, and clearly defined rights and obligations for public servants;*
> - *recruitment and promotion based on merit*

But the EC Toolbox (coming in at 487 pages) is quite unrealistic in its expectations and has clearly forgotten the excellent advice in 2002 of Merilee Grindle in her article [Good Enough Governance](#) – namely to focus on the important things….

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[3] a rare set of guidelines was given in 2001 by Manning et al http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/06/22/000090341_20050622142938/Rendered/PDF/32699.pdf
[4] the sociologists and anthropologists have given us a useful critique of the role of anti-corruption
[5] consumer feedback on public services - one of the tools summarised in a useful meniu published by the World Bank in 2005 http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/civilservice/ACSRCourse2007/Session%208/IncreasingGovEffectiveness.pdf

Recommended Reading

A Governance Practitioner's Notebook (OECD 2015) A delightful sourcebook for those who want to see improvement to dip into

Making development work Bo Rothstein 2015 The Swedish Quality of Governance Institute is a body which provides thought-provoking material. This 100 page overview takes an original approach

The politics of public service provision; Brian Levy (2013) Brian Levy is an economist –

What is Governance? Francis Fukuyama (2013) Fukuyama is a key writer in this field

Good Governance - Inflation of an Idea Merilee Grindle 2010

4. VALUES AND WORLD VIEWS

"I am convinced that the luckiest of geographic circumstances and the best of laws cannot maintain a constitution in despite of mores, whereas the latter can turn even the most unfavourable circumstances and the worst laws to advantage. The importance of mores is a universal truth to which study and experience continually bring us back. I find it occupies the central position in my thoughts: all my ideas come back to it in the end".
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

"The central conservative truth is that it is culture not politics that determines the success of a society….The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself"
Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan

"Why is it that social scientists are so averse to explanations that advance culture as a possible explanation. Are they all secret Marxists still influenced by Marx's shopworn and too-simple ideas about substructure and superstructure? Are they still, as a legacy of the Nazi regime and World War II, concerned that what were then called "national character studies," will lead to ethnic stereotyping and, hence, to mass extermination of Jews, gypsies, and others? Or are they so PC that, having mistakenly conflated culture and race, they fear above all—the unpardonable sin—of being labeled "racist." One can legitimately argue the degree of importance of culture as an explanatory factor but, in considering cultural explanations, it has become clear to me that something more than "mere" science is at work here. Something else, something deeper, is afoot. Is it ideology; is it psychological; is it political correctness; what is it?"
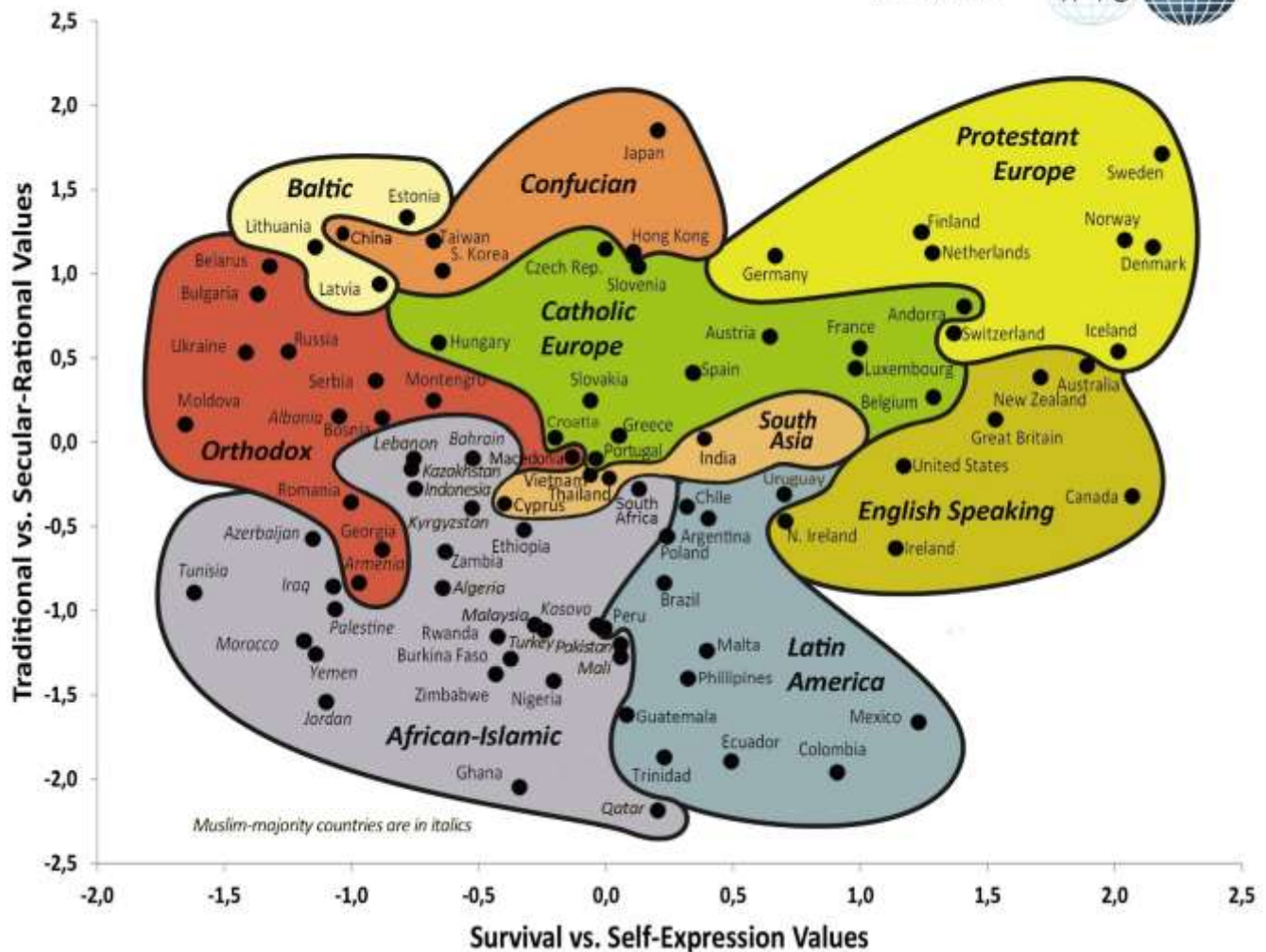Howard Wiarda intro to "Political Culture, Political Science and Identity Politics – an uneasy alliance" (2014)

Moynihan's statement turns up in title of Lawrence Harrison's 2006 book [The Central Liberal Truth – how politics can change a culture and save it from itsel](#)f in which he asserts a view which is no longer acceptable in these politically-correct days. It is one, however, with which I find myself in strong agreement -

The influence of cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes on the way that societies evolve has been shunned by scholars, politicians, and development experts, notwithstanding the views of Tocqueville, Max Weber, and more recently Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, David Landes, Robert Putnam, and Lucian Pye, among others. It is much more comfortable for the experts to cite geographic constraints, insufficient resources, bad policies, and weak institutions. That way they avoid the invidious comparisons, political sensitivities, and bruised feelings often engendered by cultural explanations of success and failure. But by avoiding culture, the experts also ignore not only an important part of the explanation of why some societies or ethno-religious groups do better than others with respect to democratic governance, social justice, and prosperity. They also ignore the possibility that progress can be accelerated by (1) analyzing cultural obstacles to it, and (2) addressing cultural change as a remedy.

there is compelling evidence, for example from Geert Hofstede's comparative analyses of cultural differences in IBM offices around the world,18 and the World Values Survey (see graphic below), which assesses values and value change in some 65 countries, that meaningful patterns exist in the values, beliefs, and attitudes of nations, and even "civilizations," that make generalizations both valid and useful.

This field is so rich in understanding that I am amazed how social scientists avoid it like the plague. In its absence, they are left only with geopolitics as an explanatory factor…

Belief systems mapped by the World Values Survey

A few years back. I explored how I had understood different world views on offer and the five posts in this section amplify that – with a final annotated bibliography

Title	Takeaway
Cultural Values, theory and Wars	How I understand a complicated field
Mapping values and world views	Mind Games - 3 or 4 world views?
The fourth dimension	Ronnie lessem and Frans Trompenaars first alerted me to this field of discussion
What about me?	A psychology book gets me thinking
Church of economism	Economics as the new religion/world view

Cultural Values, cultural theory and Cultural Wars

"[Whenever I hear the word "culture" I reach for my gun](#)" is a quip attributed generally to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's intellectual propaganda chief which actually comes from a play produced by a minor Nazi for Hitler's 44th birthday. The martial association is understandable given the nature of "political culture".

The last post left me aware of a confusion in the use of phrases such as worldview, cultural values and world values – and a compulsion to track down the intellectual sources behind the words. This was no easy task since the field is a rich one – inhabited by specialist academics with jargon and a dense writing style.

Although the post is short, its complexity is reflected in the fact that it's taken a full day to compose

And one of my tables has helped clarify my thoughts – although left questions which will require a proper study of the books I've been able to find. This, therefore, should be treated as very much a first attempt

Term used	Meaning	Origin	Typical referents
"Worldviews"	collection of **quasi- philosophical/religious** BELIEFS which seem to give us our respective identities		Kant Wittgenstein
"Political Culture"	A term used by political scientists which can be traced to de Tocqueville but whose modern origin is generally attributed to the 1950s and Gabriel Almond	In the 1940s and 1950s "culture" figured in the work of many American scholars as they tried to understand the challenge of modernisation faced by many societies but was then supplanted by the "rationality" of the economists Lawrence Harrison and Samuel Huntington took the theme up again in late 1980s – with [Culture Matters – how culture shapes social progress](#) (2000) being a seminal work, criticised for really meaning Western Culture matters	Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Edward Banfield, Gabriel Almond, SM Lipset Lawrence Harrison Samuel Huntington
"World values"	Clusters of VALUES eg "traditional", "modern" and "postmodern" which have been used by technocrats to make various types of social intervention	This stream of work began in 1981	political scientists and psychologists particularly Ronald Inglehart
"Cultural values"	An indeterminate term	social psychologist [Geert Hofstede](#) started work in the 1960s with IBM on cultural differences – taken up by Frans Trompenaars It also figured in the discussions about "transitology" in the 1990s	Geert Hofstede Frans Trompenaars
"Cultural theory"	Otherwise known as "grid-group" theory, [best summarised here](#)	Anthropologist Mary Douglas first developed the "grid-group" approach in the 1970s which was then taken up by policy analyst Wildavsky and political scientist Thompson	Mary Douglas Aaron Wildavsky Michael Thompson

- [Cultural explanations of economic failure](#) 2019 A useful critique of our (over)readiness to use the cultural explanation – if a bit academic
- [The Cultural Foundations of Economic Failure: A Conceptual Toolkit](#); Paul Collier (2015) Collier is a development economist who wrote an excellent recent book about capitalism and several important studies on migration.

The Fourth Dimension?

It's strange how our mind operates on single tracks but suddenly makes a connection with an idea that has been travelling on a parallel track.

This past year has seen regular posts about the idea behind the blog's new title – that writers who work across boundaries (be they cultural or intellectual) **tend to think more creatively and to express their ideas more clearly** than those stuck in the old silos. I even developed a table of some 20 writers to prove the point.

Completely separately, there have also been regular posts about **cultural values** – referring to the work of people such as de Hofstede; Ronald Inglehart; FransTrompenaars; Richard Lewis (of When Cultures Collide fame) and Richard Nesbitt. That body of writing emphasises the **distinctiveness** of cultural values and is most graphically illustrated in the Inglehart cultural map of the world which is best explained in this brochure. Those were the days when a body of literature called "path dependency" was raising important questions about how "sticky" cultural values were…viz how difficult to change national behavioural traits

There is one guy who could have helped me make **the connection between these two very separate streams of thinking** – and that is the rather neglected figure of **Ronnie Lessem**. Ronnie who? I hear you asking

I first came across his work in the early 1990s when I bought a copy of "**Global Management Principles**" (1989) which impressed me very much. It -

> Classifies the management literature (and styles) of the twentieth century using the points of the compass.
> North" is traditional rational bureaucracy: "West" celebrates the animality of the frontier spirit: "East" the developmental side of the collectivity; and "South" the metaphysical
> He then goes on to argue that organisations and individuals also go through such phases. It is undoubtedly the most inter-disciplinary of the management books: and gives very useful vignettes of the writers and their context.

And utterly original – as you would expect of someone raised in Zimbabwe in southern Africa who then moved to the UK. His work blazed a trail, however, which few have chosen to follow – it's just too original! His personal style of writing was a bit daring for academia in those days! And his references sometimes too wide – in the opening pages he quotes approvingly the development style of the ultimately-disgraced Bank for Credit and Commerce

In a way, it embodies the thesis-antithesis-synthesis approach beloved by those who refuse to accept the Manichean view of the world and argue instead for "balance" (Giddens; Mintzberg) - except that it adds a fourth dimension!

Which is my cue for an (overdue) **discussion of this issue of World Views**. In the 1970s anthropologist Mary Douglas developed what she called the "**grid-group" typology**, consisting of four very different "world views" – what she calls hierarchist, egalitarian, individualist and fatalist. This came to be known as "Cultural Theory"

I came across Mary Douglas' theory only in 2000, thanks to public admin theorist Chris Hood's "The Art of the State" which uses her typology brilliantly to help us understand the strengths, weaknesses and risks of the various world views.

I am aware of only one book-length study which compares and contrasts these various models "Way of life theory – the underlying structure of world views, social relations and lifestyles" – a rather disjointed dissertation by one, Michael Edward Pepperday (2009) an introduction to which is here.

Those wanting to know more can read this post which might encourage them to have a look at this short article "A Cultural Theory of Politics" which shows how the approach has affected a range of disciplines. Grid, group and grade – challenges in operationalising cultural theory for cross-national research (2014) is a longer and, be warned, very academic article although its comparative diagrams are instructive

Mapping Values and World Views

We need to pay more attention to our mind - and to the different patterns of meaning we create in our effort to make sense of the world.

In my youth, I was aware of a **tripartite division** – conservatives, socialists and liberals. Not for me the Manichean approach of insider/outsider or left/right. **There was always a third way** – be it green or ecological.

The blog has, of course, had regular posts about **cultural values** – discussing the work of people such as de Hofstede; Ronald Inglehart; FransTrompenaars; Richard Lewis (of When Cultures Collide fame) and Richard Nesbitt – a body of writing which emphasises the **distinctiveness** of national **values** most graphically illustrated in the Inglehart cultural map of the world and best explained in this brochure.

It was, of course, multinational companies who funded a lot of this work as they tried to understand how they could weld different nationalities into coherent and effective teams

Those were the days when a body of literature called "path dependency" was raising important questions about how "sticky" cultural values were...viz how difficult national behavioural traits are to change

It was only in 2000, however, that I became aware of the **four dimensions of grid-group theory** which anthropologist Mary Douglas introduced - consisting of four very different "world views" (what she calls hierarchist, egalitarian, individualist and fatalist) which came to be known as "Cultural Theory". I came across Mary Douglas' theory only in 2000, thanks to public admin theorist Chris Hood's "The Art of the State" which uses her typology brilliantly to help us understand the strengths, weaknesses and risks of these various world views.

It's interesting that many people now assume that this exhausts the number of world views. One book-length study compares and contrasts these various models "Way of life theory – the underlying structure of world views, social relations and lifestyles" – a rather disjointed dissertation by Michael Edward Pepperday (2009) an introduction to which is here.

But I'm just learning that I've been missing some important perspectives. A Futurist called Andy Hines has just sent me a copy of what is (despite the title) a quite fascinating book he wrote in 2011 - Consumer Shift - how changing values are reshaping the consumer landscape

which is actually much more about values and world views than it is about consumers....Its Annexes are particularly interesting – including an annotated bib

This reflects a lot of work which companies had been funding to try to get into the minds of their consumers - but which international charities suddenly realised a decade or so ago could also be used to prise money out of all of us for _their_ (more altruistic) purposes (see below) – a politicisation of which Adam Curtis' documentaries have made us much more aware.

Hines' book in turn took me to Spiral Dynamics – mastering values, leadership, change; produced by Don Beck and Chris Cowan in 1996 inspired by the largely neglected work of their teacher - an American psychologist, Clare Graves.

Both books have crucial explorations of the very different levels of explanation needed for discussions of behaviour and the values which underpin it.

And lead into recent books by Jeremy Lent - the earliest of which is "The Patterning Instinct – a cultural history of man's search for meaning" which

> _is filled with details about how the brain works, how patterns of thought arise, how these shared symbols (language, art, religion, science) give rise to cultural metaphors such as "Nature as Machine" and "Conquering Nature," and how these worldviews in turn lead to historical change. However, different cultures have different metaphors, and it is our culture, according to Lent, western (now global) culture, which is largely to blame for the damaging ways in which our root metaphors have manifested themselves on the planet._

I get the sense that psychologists, sociologists, political scientists and anthropologists have approached the question of cultural values completely separately and at different times - making few attempts to engage one another in discussion? It's such a critical issue that it's time they reached out to one another

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What about Me?

A couple of years ago I asked whether our social DNA was changing. I conceded that older generations have this annoying habit of finding fault with the latest generation – in our case things like the "attention deficit" which modern IT gadgets seem to develop, "instant gratification" and how this might affect future "character".

Surveys such as the **World Values and Eurobarometer** do indicate a large and significant trend since the early 1970s toward **more individualistic, selfish and less trusting societies**....And the post quoted the studies on this of people such as Daniel Bell (Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism), Richard Sennett (The Culture of the New Capitalism), Francis Fukuyama (The Great Disruption – human nature and the reconstitution of social order) – ending with Reckless Opportunists – elites at the end of the establishment (2018) with its ruthless exposure of the almost criminal damage which a new breed of elites have inflicted on a once proud nation.

But we have to be careful – none of these writers have any particular claims to have psychological insights into people's souls. They are, rather, social commentators. I read the occasional psychology book – Robin Skynner and John Cleese's "Life and How to Survive it" (1993) made a big impact. Jonathan Haidt's "The Righteous Mind" was much appreciated – Steven

Pinker less so. [What About Me? the struggle for identity in a market-based society](#) by a Dutch psychotherapist, Paul Verhaege, came out in 2014 and was quite an unusual choice for me. It lay on the shelf for some time before I opened it – to discover a real gem. It ranges through intellectual history, sociology and ethics before suggesting that the last few decades have seen a radical new self-identity being engineered – which he calls "The Enron Society".

The book starts by contrasting our two basic urges as individuals - the initial sense of "belonging" and the growing need for "separation" - and how this expresses itself in later struggles eg "self-respect" v "self-hatred".
From his initial discussion of "identity", he then moves onto a fascinating discussion of values and morality - showing how the Greeks had an integrated view of our character which Christianity destroyed when it placed God as an external power. The Enlightenment dethroned religion to an extent – although Verhaeghe argues that Diderot's emphasis on reason, passion and empathy was set aside by an unholy coalition of Voltaire and Rousseau who basically helped the French state set up a new religion. He also argues that true rationality started only after the second WW – which fits with the more recent arguments of people like Nicolas Guilhot who are beginning to analyse the role of the military in the post-war social sciences.

It's the chapter on the Enron Society where he really lets rip – "The west has never had it so good – but never felt so bad!" leads to a discussion on mental illness and the pharma industry. How, he asks, has 30 years of neoliberalism affected our DNA – with its "Rank and Yank" systems of management; Universities as knowledge businesses; anonymous call-centres; CCTV; ubiquitous contracts, rules, regulations, league tables, fear, uncertainty - but no real accountability

Typically, however, it's the final section which lets him down. Apart from repeating Mintzberg's call for "balance" and praising the Wilkinson/Pickett line on equality, his only advice seems to be for greater activism – "Ditch the cynicism!"!!

But it's good to have a text from outwith the anglo-american core – with several interesting discoveries in his little bibliography (although it doesn't mention Kenneth Gergen's "The Saturated Self" or "Life and How to Survive it"). In the same spirit, I was [disappointed to notice](#) that William Davies' [Nervous States – how feeling took over the world](#) (2018) didn't mention Verhaeghe;s book. Another Netherlands writer offers this [great annotated bibliography](#) on matters of the mind and rationality

The Church of Economism

Born during the Second World War, mine was the more optimistic, **modernist generation** brought up on the Huxleys, HG Wells, GB Shaw and Bertrand Russell.

Keynes and the Atom Bomb were probably the two factors which helped us brush aside the doubts about modernity which had plagued the inter-war generation and place our faith firmly in science. And the new discipline of Economics was part of our new-found confidence. It was Gordon Brown's fate to pronounce the "end of boom and bust" just before the global financial system imploded in 2007. But **economists have established themselves for at least 50 years as the new priesthood on whose words we all hang**…….

That is slowly changing - 2008, of course, should have been the death knell for economics since it had succumbed some decades earlier to a highly-simplified and unrealistic model of the economy which was then starkly revealed in all its nakedness…..**Steve Keen was one of the first economists to break ranks very publicly way back in 2001** and to set out an alternative - Debunking Economics – the naked emperor dethroned.

This coincided with economics students in Paris objecting to the homogeneity of syllabi and reaching out to others – creating in the next 15 years a movement which has become global. This is a good presentation on the issues (from 2012) and an excellent little Penguin book The Econocracy – the perils of leaving economics to the experts by Joe Earle, Cahal Moran and Zach Ward-Perkins (2017) is based on their experience of stirring things up on the Manchester University economics programme. The book's sub-title says it all!

But the groundwork for the challenge to the what some have called the imperialist grab of economics had been laid much earlier – with EJ Mishan's "The Costs of Economic Growth" (1967); Schumacher's "Small is Beautiful – economics as if people mattered" (1973) and Hazel Henderson's "Creating Alternative Futures" (1978)

And it was some 2 decades ago that the notion of economics as a religion was first aired; and has become an increasingly serious proposition – as you will see from this table I have constructed.

I still remember the moment when I realised that the scholastic disputes during the Reformation were exactly the same as can be found amongst contemporary economists. I was reading Diarmaid MacCulloch's large volume about the Reformation in my kitchen in Bishkek in 2005 or so when it suddenly became so obvious. But, until I did this table, Susan George and Brian Davey were the only people I knew making this argument. But yesterday I came across of Rapley's "Twilight of the Money Gods" and googling unearthed the rest……

Those wanting a good short intro to the subject might want to read Richard Norgaard's article Church of Economism and its Discontents

Key Books on the subject of Economics (and management) as the new religion

Title	Author's background	Comment
Faith and Credit – the World Bank's Secular Empire Susan George and Fabrizzio Sabelli (1994)	Political scientist and activist – and anthropological economist	The first book I remember making this argument
Economics and religion – are they distinct? HG Brennan and A Watermann (1994)	Brennan is a political Philosopher	A new discovery for me
The Faith of the Managers – when management becomes a religion; Stephen Pattison (1997)	Management and theology	The only title which seems to make the connection
Economics as Religion – from Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond ; Robert H Nelson 2001	Economist with strong interest in history of the discipline and environment	Nelson was a very distinguished academic
Political Economy and Theology since the Enlightenment; A Watermann 2004	Economist	Very thorough exploration
From economics imperialism to Freakonomics Ben Finer (2009)	Economist	
Is God an Economist? By S. Wagner-Tsukamoto 2009	Interdisciplinary scholar	
Economics as Good and Evil -= the quest for economic meaning Thomas Sedlacek (2011)	Economist	And, as a very young man, was adviser to Vaclev Havel
Credo - economic beliefs in a world in crisis; Brian Davey (2014)	Started in economics and moved to community development	
Twilight of the Money Gods – economics as religion and how it all went wrong John Rapley 2017 – book can be read here	Development economist who mixes practice with theory	And changes his career path – at one stage becoming a journalist
Bettering Humanomics – a new , and old, approach to economic science; Deirdre McCloskey (2021)	Economic historian	And a superb writer – although this book makes no concessions

Further Reading

- The Web of Meaning; Jeremy Lent (2021) an important follow up to his 2017 book
- Cultural Evolution – people's motivations are changing, and reshaping the world; Ronald Inglehart (2018) One of the clearest statements of the third school
- Cultural Evolution – people's motivations are changing, and reshaping the world ; Ronald Inglehart (2018) Inglehart, a political scientist, has been at the heart of discussion about cultural values for the past 50 years – both the book and this article summarise that work.
- The Patterning Instinct; Jeremy Lent (2017) how worldviews develop and can change history
- A World of Three Cultures – honour, achievement and joy; M Basanez (2016) a beautifully-written book by a Mexican academic which seems to have exactly the outsider's take on the subject I need. And one of the early chapters is a literature review!
- Political Culture and Value Change – excerpt from a 2015 book
- Political Culture, political science and identity politics – an uneasy alliance; Howard Wiarda (2014) a highly accessible overview of the field
- The Central Liberal Truth – how politics can change a culture and save it from itself; Lawrence Harrison (2006) A very clear analysis from a school rather in disgrace at the moment for its continued belief in western progress
- Developing Cultures - Essays on Cultural Change Lawrence Harrison and Jerome Kagan (2006)
- Culture Matters – how culture shapes social progress; ed L Harrison and S Huntington (2000) For

my money, this is one of the most interesting books – although some of the authors are no longer considered to be politically correct. But at least the authors feel free to express what they think!

- Value Change in Global Perspective P Abramson and R Inglehart (1995)
- The Geography of Thought – how westerners and asians think differently and why; Ricard Nesbitt (2003) An American social psychologist gives a thought-provoking book
- Riding the Waves of Culture – understanding cultural diversity in business; Frans Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner (1997) the Dutchman who took on de Hofstede's mantle
- Culture matters – essays in honour of Aaron Wildavsky (1997) of which this is one key chapter
- When Cultures Collide – leading across cultures; Richard Lewis (1996) The book which introduced us to the field – and gave us marvellous vignettes of the strange habits of almost all countries of the world

Articles/papers
- Britain's Choice – common ground and divisions in 2020s Britain (More in Common 2020) a detailed picture of how the values of the british people were differentiated
- The Cultural Foundations of Economic Failure: A Conceptual Toolkit; Paul Collier (2015) Collier is a development economist who wrote an excellent recent book about capitalism and several important studies on migration.
- Grid, group and grade – challenges in operationalising cultural theory for cross-national research (2014) is a very academic article although its comparative diagrams are instructive
- "A Cultural Theory of Politics" (2011) a short article which shows how the grid-group approach has been used in a range of disciplines
- Common Cause – the case for working with our cultural values (2010) a useful little manual for charities
- Finding Frames – new ways to engage the UK public (2010) ditto
- Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions; Keith Grint (2008) a short very useful article by an academic
- The many voices of political culture – a very useful overview from 2000
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227237138_Toward_Cultural_Analysis_in_Policy_Analysis_Picking_Up_Where_Aaron_Wildavsky_Left_Off

4. Dispatches to the Next Generation

At the start of the millennium, I started writing from a concern to make sense of the direction in which the world was heading. It started life in 2001 as a short note - [Draft Guide for the perplexed](#)[6] - and an analysis that went as follows –

- Consumerism is killing the planet – and making people miserable.
- a lot of people are getting poorer
- government is getting ever more centralised (notwithstanding Scottish devolution).
- Social democrats like New Labour have sold the state to corporate interests.
- don't blame individuals such as Tony Blair – it's in the nature of modern politics. Note the political corruption in Italy, Belgium, Germany, France and now Britain.

The paper then
- looked at the organisations and people I admired;
- what they were achieving;
- where they seemed to be failing and why; and
- posed the question of how someone of my age, experience and resources might add his tuppence worth to help improve things.

Since 2009 a [blog has recorded my efforts](#) to make sense of a venal system which seemed out of control – with posts containing extensive hyperlinks and book excerpts. For the past few years I have been collecting the more relevant of these to put a little book together to answer that original question of 20 years ago.

I lived through most of the Thatcher regime and my original note did register that something irrevocable was happening to the political system. But, **when the global financial crash came in 2008, I too readily attributed its causes to what had been unleashed by UK and US policies in the 1980s.**

What I have begun to understand in the last few years is that the sources of our malaise are both earlier and more complex. And that I belong to the generation which has unleashed a new spirit of disrespect for the past, of entitlement and of hubris into the world.

Like Sisyphus, "Dispatches to the Next Generation" is the rock I push up the mountain – only to see it rolling back down the hill as what I thought were original insights crumble into dust. It is by way of an apology to my daughters and their generation…It was a [15th century Arab author,](#) Ibn Khaldun, who first noted that human beings pass through **four generational patterns**

- The **first-generation** revolts against the old order - and brings fresh, new ideas.
- The **second generation**, having been part of the generation that saw change, wants to establish some form of order.
- Then the **third generation** appears, they are more pragmatic and less connected with the past. They are interested less in ideas and more in building things. People become materialistic and individualistic during this phase.
- The **fourth generation** comes along and senses that society has lost its vitality – that its values are wrong. People become cynical, and this lays the foundation for the revolutionary generation to disrupt the status quo. And the cycle repeats.

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[6] A [2013 version of the paper](#) starts with the original note

In the much more recent "The Laws of Human Nature" (2018) Robert Greene applied the generational hypothesis to our own times, by suggesting that

- the **silent generation** that experienced the Great Depression and the World War as children were cautious, embodying a spirit that embraces order and stability.
- The **baby boomers**, who grew up in the 1960's saw their parents as being too conservative. They became more open, idealistic, and adventurous.
- Then came **Generation X**, recovering from the chaos of the 70's. This generation rebelled against their parent's idealism and controversy, seeing the holes in their philosophy, they embraced individualistic values and self-reliance (if not downright greed – my comment).
- Then **the Millennials** emerged, distrustful of the individualism of the past after witnessing the terrorism that took place in 9/11 and the financial disaster of 2008, and valued security and teamwork more.

This section represents this year's posts as I struggled to conclude my draft by trying to catch the new post-pandemic spirit...

Title of Post	Takeaway
Expandable Books	A short summary of each chapter
We're on our own	How the balance of power in societies has changed for the worst in the past 60 years – what a citizen-led policy programme would contain – and why we'll never see it.
Querying the texts	A list of the books I feel I need to read to complete mine!
Some tough lessons from the past 50 years	Have we become so narcissistic that we have lost all collective power?
Open letter to Mintzberg	Mintzberg's "Rebalancing Society" was one of the first books to recognise that there needed to be a rebalancing of power in society. We had exchanged messages before – so I decided to write this Open Letter to him
Mintzberg replies	And got this reply
When it all gets too much	We cope with crises in such different ways – some with denial; others with indifference – the brave with action. But is complexity theory perhaps neoliberalism in a new guise?
Fighting fatalism	The brave activists speak out
Change the world	I have a go at systems theory – but fall back on my old favourite – Robert Quinn
Critical reading	What I made of the initial books on my reading list
Seven ways to change the world	But I then got distracted – not least by Gordon Brown's latest book
A New Class War?	I keep looking for books dealing with the notion of "countervailing power" and thought I had found one
Windows of change	does it add much to Gladwell?
Tipping Points at 21	review of Centola and other books on change
Change	some of the best references on change

Expandable books

One of my favourite television watching is [Seinfeld](#) which ran for almost a decade from its 1989 start and has [180 episodes](#). One of them has Kramer, the goofy neighbour, sell the idea of a coffee book with a small nestling table attached and duly appearing on a television talk-show to explain the idea. In that same spirit, I offer you the concept of the "expandable book"

As the guy who has actually argued that [non-fiction books should be rationed](#), you might well ask what on earth I think I'm up to - that I'm poised to inflict yet another book on readers.
My response is that this is **a <u>short</u> book which expands into larger versions**
At the moment my book is just over a hundred pages – although it has hyperlinks to the larger book on which it is based (whose links in turn lead to what must be several thousands of pages of reading). So it's a huge resource. The last [version posted on the blog was drafted in December](#)

It lists and comments on the hundreds of books which have been written in recent decades about **"the crisis".** In that sense, it has something in common with the "[50 Classic" series by Tom Butler-Bowen](#) although I can give only a tantalising sense of the worth of the books I reference - compared to the 5 or so pages which Butler-Bowen's books average for each of his 50. But it lacked, as it still does, a conclusion….So I've selected a dozen or so useful-looking recent books to see if they will help me clarify things for the missing text – including the latest writing of people such as Noam Chomsky, Geoff Hodgson, Mariana Mazzucato and Jeremy Gilbert.

But, first, I felt I should remind you of the basic argument of each chapter -

Chapter Title	Thrust of chapter arguments	Supporting arguments
1. Critical junctures identified	History is written by the victors – and the sycophants who surround them. Events were generally much more finely balanced than their versions admit. There's too much fatalism around	[Covid 19 as a Critical Juncture](#) [Out of the Belly of Hell](#)
2. Trespassing encouraged	Most leaders of organisations are in the grip of groupthink and need countervailing mechanisms of accountability to help them see new realities	Janis, t'Hart, Syed
3. Economics relegated	This intellectual discipline is deficient and yet has too much power. It needs to be brought down a peg or three	Steve Keen, Brian Davey's "Credo"
4. The Blind men probe the Elephant	Talk of capitalism and post-capitalism is too loose and reified. There are various equally legitimate ways of perceiving the "beast"	[57 Varieties of Capitalism](#)
5. A new social goal is sought for the commercial company	Shareholder value ignores other dimensions Cooperative and social enterprises employ more people than we think – but have to struggle for legitimacy	Paul Hirst Colin Mayer Ed Mayo Paul Collier
6. Lessons of change explored	So much protest fails and few social enterprises have a multiplier effect. How do we create winnable coalitions?	Robert Quinn

7. Change agents and coalitions sought	Progressives are good at sounding off – and bad at seeking common ground	Common Ground – democracy and collectivity in an age of individualism Jeremy Gilbert
8. Bringing it all together	countervailing power social enterprise	

We are on our Own

A few years ago I tried to sum things up in this way –

- The "mixed economy" which existed from 1950-1990 was a healthy and effective system for us in the West
- It worked because power was diffused. Each type of power – economic (companies/banks etc), political (citizens and workers) and legal/admin/military (the state) – balanced the other. None was dominant.
- Deindustrialisation and economic globalisation have undermined the power which working class people were able to exercise in that period through votes and union activity
- Privatisation has been a disaster – inflicting costs on the public and transferring wealth to the few
- Neo-liberalism has supplied a thought system which justifies corporate greed and the privileging (through tax breaks and favourable legislation) of the large international company
- All political parties and most media have been captured by that thought system which now rules the world
- People have, as a result, become cynical and apathetic
- Two elements of the "balanced system" (Political and legal power) are therefore now supine before the third (corporate and media power). The balance is broken and the dominant power ruthless in its exploitation of its new freedom
- It is very difficult to see a "countervailing power" which would make these corporate elites pull back from the disasters they are inflicting on us
- Social protest is marginalised
- Not least by the combination of the media and an Orwellian "security state" ready to act against "dissidence"
- But the beliefs which lie at the dark heart of the neo-liberal project do need more detailed exposure
- as well as its continued efforts to undermine what little is left of state power
- We need to be willing to express more vehemently the arguments against privatisation - existing and proposed)
- to feel less ashamed about arguing for "the commons" and for things like cooperatives and social enterprise (inasmuch as such endeavours are allowed)

We're now in winter 2021 – with the Covid pandemic still raging. How would I now update that statement??

- *we have consistently underestimated the significance of global warming and what is now called the anthropogenic era – indeed there is now open talk of "facing extinction"*
- *Globalisation is in shreds*
- *Not least through the Covid19 pandemic of 2020*
- *Societies are polarised*
- *Thrust into narrow and selfish "bubbles"*
- *Artificial intelligence threatens what we used to refer to as "employment prospects"*

118

How, in such conditions, might social forces come together with a programme which stands a good chance of reforming the political and state systems of power - so that the wings of corporate power can be properly clipped??

And make no mistake – <u>power is the central issue here</u>. At the heart of our collective malaise is the imbalance of power. We quantify everything these days – talking for example of [the 8 men who control half the planet's wealth](). But **somehow this fails to galvanise any sort of collective action** – reference to [gini-coefficients]() leaves glazed eyes

The manifestos of political parties are characterised by total irrelevance. **Totally missing are the commitments to change the power structure** eg

- Break up monopolies
- Tax the rich – who currently hide in tax havens
- Reinstate media balance (including a requirement for interviewees to reveal their sources of income)
- Develop Citizen juries
- Stop money talking
- Ensure that civil service advice is neutral

And why are such commitments missing? Because those in charge of political parties know they would then be the subject of highly aggressive attacks by journalists and academics in the pay of corporate power.

We can, in other words, no longer rely on political parties to be agents of change - we seem to be on our own

I've been trying to gather together some key books to skim for my conclusion and felt that Jeremy Gilbert's [Common Ground – democracy and collectivity in an age of individualism]() (2013) was one of the important texts whose very title recognises the basic problem we face.

A future post will share some of other titles I've gathered together for this final push….

Querying the texts

It's taken a few days to gather together and skim some of the more recent books which might be useful as I try to draft the concluding chapter to the book I've been working on for the past decade – the one in which I try to understand the sense of crisis which has overtaken the West. The last two posts summarise the book's basic arguments.

I'm one of these people who tend to read everything I can lay my hands on – imagining that it will somehow give me the clarity my confusion requires. Somehow I never learn that I **need to start with questions** – **against which I can query the text**. I have to discipline myself to articulate these questions

POWER is the big problematic for me at the moment. How – given the selfish individualism which has invaded our modern souls – is it possible for people to come together to force the system to change for the better. It was trade unions and the working class who for that brief period after the war forced a certain balance of power – what JK Galbraith called "countervailing power". The growth of the service sector and globalisation have undermined that.

And what about a programme which would actually attract votes? That's why I've included the books on socialism, social democracy and communitarianism to which I should add this article by

Nancy Fraser on what Socialism should mean in the 21st Century.

The first column gives the book titles – in chronological order – starting with the earliest. The second column explains why I think they could be useful

Title	First Impressions
Development Betrayed – the end of progress and a coevolutionary revisioning of the future; Richard Norgaard (1994)	A profound and clearly-written explanation of what has gone wrong….To keep the narrative going the main text avoids footnotes and references which are put at the end in a superb 65=page set of bibliographic notes
Why the Third Way Failed – economics, morality and the origins of "the big society"; Bill Jordan (2010)	This, for a social democrat, is one of the most important questions – why did a consensual approach which rebuffs both left and right ideologies fail? Was it the absence of a serious approach? Or are we doomed to be tribal?
Unaccountable – how the elite brokers corrupt; Janine Wedel (2014)	Wedel is an anthropologist – and applies those skills to the contemporary political system of the USA
Rebalancing Society – radical renewal beyond left, right and center Henry Mintzberg (2015)	One of my favourite little books which I've brought in as a measure for the other books. He's basically got it all – strong analysis of what's wrong; recognition of the importance of worker coops and social enterprise; and of the need for a shift in power
Back to the future of Socialism Peter Hain (2015)	Most of the books in the table are by academics but this one is by that rarity – a thinking and caring politician. The title is a reference to the classic 1956 "Future of Socialism" and is a useful update
Reclaiming the State – a progressive vision of sovereignty in a post neo-liberal world Bill Mitchell (2017)	I like the look of this book – written by an Australian - which, unusually, argues for a more activist role for the state
A Research Agenda for Neoliberalism Kean Birch (2017)	Seems to be one of these rare clearly= written books which asks the questions citizens want answers to
Wrong Turnings – how the left got lost; Geoff Hodgson (2018)	Hodgson is both a political economist and social democrat and has a strong analysis here
Why the Left Loses – the decline of the centre left; R Manwaring and P Kennedy (2018)	The classic book on social democracy (Berman) was published 15 years ago. This is a more recent assessment from Australians which looks at the lessons from recent experience. See reading list here
Is Socialism Feasible? Geoffrey Hodgson (2019)	Hodgson is a political economist and social democrat who writes clearly and is prepared to face hard truths
From What Is to What If – unleashing the power of imagination to create the world we want Rob Hopkins (2019).	Hopkins is an environmental activist who founded the Resilient Towns movement.
The Demons of Liberal Democracy; Adrian Pabst (2019)	Pabst is a Third Way man who abhors left and right. I felt this would provide a challenging read
Winners take all – the elite charade of changing the world; A Girdiharadas (2019)	One of the problems progressives have is that the devil has stolen a lot of his tunes.
Goliath – the 100-year war between monopoly power and democracy; Matt Stoller (2019)	review suggests the author has swallowed the liberal competition ideas of economists too literally; and has underestimated the power of class struggle in the post-war US achievements
The Free Society in Crisis; David Starkey (2019)	Have included this curious book largely from admiration of the author's courage in limiting his reading list to books that are more than 50 years old

The evolution of communitarian ideas – history, theory and practice Henry Tam (2019)	Communitarianism is an important strand of progressive thought Tam is a very thoughtful and excellent writer who blogs here
The Third Pillar – how the market and the state leave the community behind Raghuram Rajan (2019)	an overdue analysis of the huge role which communiity bodies have to play in the future which was all too easily dismissed by the loose talk of "The Third Way" and the "Big Society". Although we do have to ask why it is that ideas apparently attractive to mainstream opinion were never taken seriously….
The New Class War – saving democracy from the new managerial elite; Michael Lind (2020)	I want to like this book – but feel the argument that managerial power needs taking down is hardly likely in itself to lead to the rebalance of power we need
Twenty-First Century Socialism; Jeremy Gilbert (2020)	This is a short and very readable book. Gilbert is the author of Common Ground – democracy and collectivity in an age of individualism (2013)
Unrigged – how Americans are battling back to save democracy; David Daley (2020)	The book may have a focus on the US but the move to discredit democracy and disenfranchise voters is widespread (eg contemporary UK) as is evident from books with titles such as "Against Democracy" (2016)
Rentier Capitalism – who owns the economy? Brett Christophers (2020)	A British economist gives us a good sense of the curious direction the British economy has taken. Strongly influenced by the work of US economist Michael Hudson, famous for his "Killing the Host" and "J is for Junk Economics" Long review here
Authoritarianism and how to counter it; Bill Jordan (2020)	The sociology author of "Why the Third Way failed" takes on the question of why voters have turner again to "the hard men" and what we can do about it…
Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century ; Andreas Malm (2020)	Looks a really challenging read
Share the Wealth – how to end rentier capitalism; Philippe Askenazy (2021)	Too many anglo-saxon economists dominate this field – so it's good to get a French view (a translation of a 2016 book)
Mission Economy – a moonshot guide to changing capitalism; Mariana Mazzucato (2021) https://b-ok.global/book/16593681/f3322d	This Italian economist now based in Britain is one of the few economists who has been prepared to argue strongly for public investment and an activist role for government – see also Bill Mitchell (below) and Andrew Cumbers
Consequences of Capitalism; Noam Chomsky and Mary Waterstone (2021)	Very disappointing book – based on recent lectures delivered by Chomsky. And it shows….with the narrative often jumping into distracting stories.
Post Growth – life after capitalism ; Tim Jackson (2021)	The elephant in the room….a suitable note on which to finish Written in a refreshingly accessible style

Capitalism Geoffrey Ingham (2008) sociologist
Conceptualising Capitalism – institutions, evolution, future Geoffrey Hodgson (2015)

Some tough lessons from the past 50 years

The last post indicated the reading I hope to do to stimulate the grey cells as I try to draft the concluding chapter of my little book about our current malaise. It made the important point that, before we start even flicking a book, we need to have some questions in mind. This will help us quickly identify where (if at all) the text actually tries to develop answers…..

I confessed that I don't find it easy to articulate such questions – and, typically, I found my exercise producing a list of statements viz

- Western liberal capitalism has legitimacy as long as its political and economic systems work
- The economic system (capitalism) has always had its critics – but the global financial crash of 2008; climate change; and Artificial Intelligence have made the case for radical change unassailable
- For the second half of the 20th century, the political system (democracy) seemed free from such challenges - but has recently come under fire for its failure to make its citizens feel that it represents any more their interests
- Political parties have indeed surrendered almost all of their functions – which I once described as representation, manifesto implementation, extension of public insight and protection – and are left only with the selection of elites.
- Most of the terms used in discussions – such as neoliberalism, inequality, populism, identity – are useless slogans which don't contribute to anyone's understanding of what's at stake
- The present situation suits "Individualists" down to the ground
- It was 1979 when Christopher Lasch produced his "Culture of Narcissism" which anticipated the present focus on self
- "Egalitarians" are at a loss – having lost their capacity to believe in solidarity and the engines of union pressure and of social democracy
- The rest of us are utterly confused
- The structure of power is basically out of balance – as Henry Mintzberg's Rebalancing Society – radical renewal beyond left, right and center so clearly sets out
- But argument alone will not bring down the walls of privilege
- The lesson of history is that force (or its threat) is needed to effect social change
- Although history also tells us that it has to be non-violent
- Where do we find and harness such force?

Open Letter to Henry Mintzberg

I have ambivalent feelings about management writers as a breed - but make exceptions for people such as Charles Handy, [Henry Mintzberg](#), [Gareth Morgan](#) and Chris Grey.

Mintzberg and Morgan are the best known - Canadians and therefore less inclined to the fanciful nonsense that US proponents of the craft inflict on us – the other two are Brits. One of Mintzberg's highly readable books was "[Strategy Safari – a guided tour through the wilds of strategic management](#)"

Some years ago I wrote to him about an early draft of his very accessible booklet "[Rebalancing Society – radical renewal, beyond left, right and center](#)" (2015) and he was kind enough to respond and to refer to my comment in a following draft.

He actively blogs and maintains [an excellent website](#) which continues to update the text of "Rebalancing Society".

In the light of the [series of posts I've been doing](#), I thought it would be useful to drop him another note and indeed to reproduce its content as an Open Letter. After the initial reference to our previous exchange the note went as follows -

> *You rightly remind us that there are three sectors – private, public and social – and that it is the last that really matters. The actions that each and every one of us take are indeed of central importance - and the [table you included in the 2015 version is an excellent tool](#) for exploring the options open to us in all sectors.*
> *However I'm not sure if your text properly takes on board the structure of power which, of all people, you so well understand has elements of "hegemony" (I hate the word but it can be a useful shorthand).*
> *Trade unions, the working class, social democracy are, sadly, not the force they once were.*
>
> *As political parties lose their functions – and governments their usefulness to citizens – all that is left is the (withering) power of social movements and social enterprise to challenge the increasingly stronger power of monopolies and oligopolies. We are – in the dreadful language of the sociologists – losing our power of "agency"*
> *In my youth, I was a very active (Regional) politician who helped set up community structures and businesses as part of a positive discrimination strategy which the Scottish government continues to honour – but I have lost my faith in political parties.*
> *My question is – how do you persuade someone like me that there is a future in social movements – let alone in political parties or government?*
> *I have to say that I don't see enough recognition in the general literature of the importance of this issue of the structure of power and the need for an effective system of ["countervailing power"](#).*

Useful Reading

https://www.antitrustinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AAI_CountervailingPower10-15-20.pdf
https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5522&context=journal_articles
crucial post https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2021/07/11/capitalism-has-the-leopard-changed-its-spots/
For those interested to know why I regard Mintzberg as exceptional it's [worth reading this reflective piece of his](#)

Henry Mintzberg replies

Mintzberg may be officially retired but is a very busy man as his website indicates – not least with the energy he has been putting into his Rebalancing Society – radical renewal, beyond left, right and center to wake the world up from its slumbers.

But not so busy as to be unable to reply to my cri-de-coeur. His reply may have been brief – but very clear. He has simply suggested that the Reformation serves as a possible example of what can be achieved and directed me to these remarks of his on the subject which I am reproducing in their entirety -

What is known as the Reformation began with words on a door in Germany and ended with a realignment of power in Europe. In 1517, with widespread outrage over corruption in the dominating religion, an obscure monk named Martin Luther challenged its prevailing authority by nailing a list of 95 theses (really grievances) to the door of one of its churches. His words spread within weeks, carried by the new social medium of the time, the printing press. A groundswell followed, as angry people in communities confronted the corruption. Eventually, new institutions formed and some existing ones reformed. Much of the world changed.

Can our world so change? That was Europe five centuries ago, concerning the corruption of one institution. *Today we face corruption in many institutions, worldwide.*

Is reformation on a global scale impossible? *Well, the devastating effects of climate change are not only possible but existent. Income disparities are on the rise. And another great war is possible—and would be the last—with several loose cannons elected by people fed up with these income disparities. When disaster looms, the impossible can become possible, indeed necessary.*

STARTING ON THE GROUND, NOT AT THE "TOP"

Where, then, to begin?

- *At the top? The Reformation did not begin at any top, yet today that is where the preferred solutions focus: the established authorities are supposed to fix the establishment. Elect heroic leaders. Hold lofty conferences. Make 30-year plans. Pretend to fix capitalism. All to no avail. The record of heroic leadership is hardly stellar. Much of it has proved to be impotent when not autocratic. Have we not had enough of the leadership fix?*
- *The lofty conferences on global warming seem to generate more of it, thanks to all the travel, let alone the talk (not to mention the swarms of private jets that descend on Davos every year to bemoan the warming). At home, politicians with four-year mandates proclaim 30-year plans. Why do we tolerate such nonsense?*
- *Then there are the adjectival capitalism fixes—Progressive Capitalism, Caring Capitalism, Inclusive Capitalism, Sustainable Capitalism, even Democratic Capitalism (democracy being the adjective). Capitalism certainly needs fixing, but that will not fix societies broken by its own power. It is these societies that need fixing, by restoring balance across their sectors.*
- ***The change we require will have to begin on the ground****, as it did in the Reformation. Franklin Delano Roosevelt caught the spirit of this when he was asked by an activist to champion a particular change. He replied: "I agree with you. I want to do it. Now go out and make me do it." The message is clear: reforming established institutions may be the last step in reformation. The first ones have to be taken on the ground.*

PATHWAY TO REFORMATION

Consider these steps to reformation

Declaration of common cause => Reframing beliefs => Reversing wrongs and Renewing rights => Consolidating this activity => Reforming institutions

The path to reformation is opened by a compelling statement of common cause that reframes what we believe, or have been made to believe, so that we can understand what is wrong and take action to make it right. If we believe that change must come from the top, then most of us will sit around waiting for it to happen. If we believe that the wealth of globalization trickles down to everyone, then we will take what we get. If we believe that democracy is about swinging between left and right, then we will not see the [plural sector](#) for the role it must play in buttressing the power of the public and private sectors.
It is the reframing of beliefs that galvanizes action.

CONSOLIDATING ACTIVITIES
[This table outlines a variety of actions that can be taken to address our problems](#).
We are, in fact, getting a great deal of it, more than ever before. "Blessed Unrest" by Paul Hawken estimated the number of social initiatives for such activities to exceed one million, on a wide variety of fronts: for social justice, sustainable environment, world peace, reformed education, and much more. That book was published in 2007, yet consider what has been happening to the imbalance ever since. The more constructive activity we get, the worse the imbalance becomes. That is because, while the efforts for reformative change are scattered, the forces that exacerbate the imbalance work in concert, for self-interest—as when they promote conspicuous consumption.

These efforts will have to consolidate, around a common cause, which I believe will have to be the restoration of balance. A clear focus of attention (such [The Declaration of our Interdependence](#)) is required to fuse a myriad of activities into a movement for regeneration. But this consolidation cannot center on any institution or plan; it has to happen as a groundswell of community activity, as in the Reformation, but this time networked worldwide.
We shall have to recognize that imbalance in society is a root cause of the major problems we face— the social injustices, income disparities, decline of democracy, even much of climate change. How, for example, are we to reverse climate change as long as private power drives so much conspicuous consumption? In other words, if you are concerned about the climate, you had better put the rebalancing of society front and center.
The corruption of established institutions is far more widespread than at the time of Luther, and the dangers we face are far more alarming. We have glorified greed and excess long enough; it is time to value balance and benevolence. Our choice comes down to this: grounded reformation or global devastation. We can continue to plunder this planet, and each other, or we can make our way to reformation.

The clear implication is that the social media are the modern equivalent of the Gutenberg printing press. And we have noone to blame but ourselves - if we fail to seize the opportunity to bring down the systemic corruption of our existing institutions.
As the last post indicated[, his table is indeed an extraordinarily useful tool.](#)

When it all gets too much

Every [generation goes through a cycle](#) – marvelling excitedly in youth at the speed with which the world is changing; experiencing the pace of change later as more of a challenge; and, in a final period of nostalgia, regretting and resenting it.

My generation of baby-boomers may, however, be the first to be required to recognise the need for urgent change in its later years.

I was in my mid 30s when some books started to appear which sent a shiver down my spine. Two which made such an impression on me that I remember them to this day were James Robertson's [The Sane Alternative](#) (1978) and "The Seventh Enemy" by [Ronald Higgins](#) (1978). The first was very much influenced by the more technical "Limits to Growth" which had been produced by The Club of Rome in 1970. *The second looked at six looming issues - viz of the population explosion, food shortages, raw materials exhaustion, environmental degradation, nuclear power; and abuse of science and technology. But then suggested that the real enemy was the seventh – us, the human race!*

Higgins' book is no longer available but you can get the gist [from this BBC documentary](#).

They were **early harbingers of the sense of crisis which has come over most of us in the new millennium.** It wasn't, however, difficult for corporate interests to subject such texts to a barrage of criticism and ridicule – as long as things were going well and human inventiveness could be summonsed as the genie in the bottle.

But the global financial crisis of 2008 and the reality of global warming has seen a deluge of titles in the last decade reminding us that what goes up generally come down, often in calamitous crashes – written by people such as Jared Diamond, Thomas Homer-Dixon and Michael Greer.

Wherever we look today, there are crises – and it is most decidedly not just a question of perception. It's for real.

The normal human response when **you confront an unpalatable situation is to stick you head in the sand – to shut off the reality.** I readily confess that that's the way I deal with things – either that or walking away…But there's no way of walking away from the situation the world now confronts – however feverishly billionaires try to buy up remote land in places like New Zealand.

Even more reprehensible than our personal responses is the deliberate encouragement of such weak behaviour by **ideologues who give us rationalisations to justify our crassly irresponsible myopia**. I'm talking, for example, about the Think Tanks which push Hayek's doctrine of leaving the market to solve all problems – let alone the Big Dirty Money which funds the climate deniers.

> *It's those resources and algorithms which are behind the [astonishing growth of the Fake Reality](#) which has some two thirds of Republican voters in the US believing that the [last Presidential Election was stolen](#)*

> *the country remains intensely divided over the election and the 6th January events at the Capitol. Like the election audits, trials of the rioters would bring out and deepen these divisions, further radicalizing the Republican base. So too would acts of violence. The Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys and the Boogaloo Bois are just a few of the better-known paramilitary organizations that*

acted violently on January 6. There are many others. Some are national and many are local. Some are well known and many remain covert.

Now that the election has been stolen and the thief responsible has begun to propose dramatic changes to the country—and now that the deep state has proven that voting is useless in blocking them—how will members of these organizations and their sympathizers respond?
It seems plausible that at least some will respond with violence. The intelligence analyst Katrina Mulligan noted shortly after the Capitol attack that the country had just witnessed "violence with a political goal in mind: Preventing the lawful certification of presidential election results to disrupt the peaceful transition of power":
There are troubling indicators, such as a shared grievance, a strong group identity, and recruitment and training, that America could be in the early days of a violent political movement that will endure. This movement brings together conservatives, Christian nationalists, Nazi sympathizers, white supremacists, and ultranationalist groups such as the Proud Boys. While these groups united around Trump, they also have shared racial grievances that will continue to unite them.

Members of these violent groups see a political dispensation gaining force under an illegitimate president that privileges minorities and immigrants, which they understand as part of an elite plot to "replace" them as central participants in the country's politics.
Even before the Capitol attack a number of terrorism researchers saw the conditions for "incipient insurgency" emerging in the United States. David Kilkullen, an elite combat soldier who helped shape strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan, wrote that "the main long-term impact" of the violence launched against the Black Lives Matter protests last May and June might "be its radicalizing effect on a tiny minority of participants who join more violent groups as a result".
.....Before our eyes, calls to "stop the steal" of 2020 are evolving, with the help of Republican-controlled legislatures in crucial states, into a movement to in effect "steal back" the presidency in 2024.

But I'm also beginning to wonder about the Complexity Theorists – whose argument that the world is too complex for human interventions to work sustains our natural inertia.
Albert Hirschman was a brilliant polymath of a developmental economist (whose intellectual biography has just come out) who explored the arguments such people use in The Rhetoric of Reaction – perversity, futility, jeopardy (1991)

- the perversity thesis holds that any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order only serves to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy.
- The futility thesis argues that attempts at social transformation will be unavailing, that they will simply fail to "make a dent."
- the jeopardy thesis argues that the cost of the proposed change or reform is too high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment.

Have a look at any argument against a proposed reform - you will find it a variant of these three. But such fatalism offends my sense of what we used to call "free will" (and now "agency theory"). Powerful people exist – whether in corporations, international agencies or governments – who can and do influence events. Our job as citizens is to watch them carefully and protest when we can.. In the 1930s it was not difficult to identify the enemy…Today the enemy is a more voracious and complex system which we variously call "globalisation" or "neoliberalism" and only more recently "capitalism" - whose disastrous consequences the activists of Porto Allegro had exposed -

although it took the crash of 2008 to prove the point…

Fighting Fatalism

Hayek was bad enough – with his belief that markets would solve any problem. But the complexity theorists seem to have driven the last nail into the coffin of Free Will. John Urry was a much-lamented UK sociologist with a superb article here describing and analysing complexity theory about which he also wrote a book ("Global Complexity" 2005)

My generation believed three things which kept its sanity –
- Governments had effective machinery and tools at its disposal to deal with most problems
- Political parties reflected public feelings and had some influence over governments formed from its leading members
- Enough fuss and pressure from society – whether media, public opinion, voluntary organisations or trade unions – would get results

We no longer believe any of these things – indeed anyone who offers such judgements is seen as old-fashioned if not eccentric…..
A combination of globalisation, privatisation and neoliberalism has sucked the lifeblood not only from governments but from political parties – leaving social movements to perform as a colourful, pantomime distraction.

Fortunately, however, there are still a few voices left – bravely articulating detailed messages which point to a better way. People like Yanis Varoufakis and George Monbiot and, for those prepared to do some really serious reading, authors such as Mariana Mazzucato - with her latest "Mission Economy – a moonshot guide to changing capitalism" to which the great blog Crooked Timber is devoting a discussion series from which I've taken an extract -

> She starts from the view that at present both capitalism and governments are dysfunctional. In Chapter 2 she identifies the four sources of the problems of capitalism as (1) the short-termism of the financial sector (including the deeply problematic issue that, given the role of financial institutions, its profits are privatized but its losses are socialized, as we saw in the 2008 financial crisis); (2) the financialization of business; (3) climate emergency and (4) slow or absent governments.

> In Chapter 3, Mazzucato points at New Public Management theory as the culprit for the widespread myth that failures of the public sector are more serious than failures of the private sector, which has been used to justify the massive increase in privatizations and outsourcing. And this, Mazzucato argues, has led to a reduction of the capabilities in the public sector, which in turn makes it harder to change weak or bad policies. The main problem with the government right now is not its size, but rather that its capacities, skills and expertise have been diminished, which has also demoralized public servants.
> What we need instead, is 'Moonshot thinking', which entails that governments should have an ambition that is so inspiring and concrete, that it motivates all to contribute to reaching that goal; this is what Mazzucato calls 'a public purpose' – the most essential thing a government should have, and which will motivate its partnership with business. Innovation and commercial success will happen along the way.

Chapter 4 describes the Apollo program in the 1960s as an example of what governments can accomplish if they have a clear mission that all are contributing to. At that time, the mission was "bring a man to the moon and safely back to earth" – in the historical context of the Cold War (not an unimportant detail, perhaps!). The Apollo program was driven by mission-oriented innovation, full with great risks and many failures from which lessons were learnt. At the early stages, poor communication within NASA seemed its weakest point; apparently this problem was addressed so successfully that the dynamic communications set-up within NASA was later copied by businesses. There were many other problems with the Apollo program, and Mazzucato argues that solutions were found by organizations and people willing to experiment, rather than picking supposedly good solutions in advance. Talented and hardworking people, risk taking and adapting, are key aspects of a successful mission.

Chapter 5 explains how mission-oriented thinking looks like by applying it to several missions for our times: the Sustainable Development Goals, the American and European Green New Deals, accessible health, and narrowing the digital divide. In all of these missions, the aim is to catalyze collaboration between many different sectors, and to change our view of the government as regulating and correcting markets and being a lender of last resort to being the creator and shaper of markets, and an investor of first resort willing to take the high risks that are needed for long-term thinking, and who aims to crowd in private funding and collaborations.

Chapter 6 sketches how the political economy of this capitalism-with-a-public-purpose would look like. Mazzucato writes that there are 7 pillars that a political economy that can guide a mission-oriented approach should have:
(1) a new approach to value;
(2) markets as being co-created and shaped by the government;
(3) organizations that have the capabilities to co-create for the public purpose, including taking risks, experimenting and learning;
(4) an approach to finance that does not start by asking what the budget is, but by "what needs to be done" and as a derivative question asks how to pay for it;
(5) fighting inequality not only be redistribution but first of all by predistribution;
(6) reimagine the relation between government and businesses as a partnership around a common goal; and
(7) new forms of participation, debate, discussion and consensus-building.

Three other relevant books are -
- Bill Mitchell's Reclaiming the State – a progressive vision of sovereignty in a post neo-liberal world (2017) is from a leftist Australian economist.
- Futures of Socialism – the COVID pandemic and post-Corbyn Era; ed Grace Blakely (2020) is a little book which contains short pieces from those sympathetic to the direction Corbyn was trying to take the Labour party.
- The Return of the State – restructuring Britain for the Common Good Ed P Allen et al (2021)
A book calling for a rethink on globalisation and the place of financial capital – with contributions from people such as Robert Skidelsky, Ann Pettifor and Stewart Lansley – questioning the role of financial capital.
https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii129/articles/javier-moreno-zacares-euphoria-of-the-rentier

Change the World?

I haven't forgotten my intention to address Henry [Mintzberg's point that the Reformation offers an example to give us hope](#) in these difficult times - when fatalism and laisser-faire seem to have such a grip on our minds. It's just that – before I try to do his argument justice – I felt I needed to explore my own confusions a bit more…..I've posted a couple of times about [the difficulty I have in getting my head around systems thinking](#).

I'm never very sure whether to damn the systems thinkers in with the complexity theorists but continue, for the moment, to give the former the benefit of the doubt. It was the title of [Systems Thinking for Social Change](#); David Peter Stroh (2015) which caught my eye - anyone interested in social change, I reasoned, must have an inclination to activism and therefore to resist the siren calls from the agents of laisser-faire. But Stroh's prose is too typically gushy American to attract me to his thought.

[Systemic Thinking – building maps for a world of systems](#) (2013) seems a better bet, written as it is by an Englishman (John Boardman) and American - Briand Sauser - with a more friendly presentation, short chapters and diagrams. And its concluding chapter has a nice, clear, summary of the book's basic argument -

> *This is a book about problem-solving, but with a difference. We recognized three vital characteristics, which for far too long have been overlooked or neglected in problem-solving books. First, we identified that while solutions undoubtedly "deal with" the problems to which they relate, they **also create a new wave of problems in their wake**. In our complex world, this problem-generating characteristic of solutions cannot be ignored, and problem-solving itself must take care not to become problem spreading in nature. It has been widely recognized for some time that problems themselves can spread or cascade, as in the case of electricity supply networks (e.g., the New York City blackout) or the growth of cancer in the human body (e.g., prostate cancer in adult males). But the realization of problems elsewhere caused by the creation of a solution in some particular area of interest, removed from these affected other regions, is both alarming and unsettling. The way forward that we proposed in this book gives due recognition to this phenomenon.*
>
> *Second, the emergence of a class of person known as problem solver, identified by skills in problem-solving, has reduced the burden on the class known as problem owner, to the extent that the latter has effectively transferred the problem and subsequently lost ownership, and in so doing has created a false picture for the former who cannot therefore avoid endowing the solution with the problem-spreading gene. **This distinction of classes, one that effectively divorces the two, must be overcome, and problem solving in our complex world must restore the vitality of problem ownership among those who sense the problem in the first instance.***
>
> *The third characteristic is something we can more easily recognize if we stand back from the first two. When a solution to a given problem also leads to a wave of new problems, then problem solving essentially becomes problem spreading. When problem solving attracts a new breed of people who become known as problem solvers, then responsibility for the problem is in effect transferred— from those it first affects or who sense it, with attendant diminution in problem ownership. We might say **problem solving becomes problem dispossession**. So standing back leads us to conclude that the originating problem is strongly connected to a host of "accompanying apparatus," including owners, solvers, and problem-solving approaches.*
>
> *It is this connectedness that marks out this third characteristic that we believe has hitherto been*

*sorely neglected and about which this book has much to say. Moreover, this book has much to offer by way of a responsive way forward. Our way forward is what we call systemic thinking. **It is a way of thinking that emphasizes connectedness and enables people to see the bigger picture; one in which owners, solvers, solutions, problem solving methods, and problem descriptions are portrayed as a whole system."***

In a sense, however, I don't need convincing. I don't think I could live with myself if I didn't believe in "human agency" – ie the possibility that - as Margaret famously Mead put it –

"never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has".

And so far no book has spoken to me on this theme louder than Robert Quinn's "Change the World" which I summarised here

The Importance of Critical Reading

A few weeks back, I shared a list of books which I felt would help me as I tried to draft a conclusion to the book I've been working on for the past few years about the sense of crisis which has gripped us westerners since the start of the new millennium.
I confessed that I was one of these gullible readers who imagined that reading would somehow transmit important messages to my brain – and that I **lacked the patience to formulate some questions with which to interrogate a book before I opened it**……

And lo – after 5 weeks – despite having recognised the importance of these books, I've failed utterly to follow through. **The books lie unread – perhaps because I couldn't be bothered to pose the sorts of questions which would help me identify those sections of books** which seemed to offer answers
So, I'm having another go – but I never learn….I've added a few more books!!
But, this time, I'll start at the beginning – and try to work my way through the list – gradually…..hopefully posting as I go?

The first column gives the book titles – in chronological order – starting with the earliest. The second column explains why I think they could be useful

Title	First Impressions
Development Betrayed – the end of progress and a coevolutionary revisioning of the future; Richard Norgaard (1994)	A profound and clearly-written explanation of what has gone wrong….To keep the narrative going the main text avoids footnotes and references which are put at the end in a superb 65=page set of bibliographic notes
Why the Third Way Failed – economics, morality and the origins of "the big society"; Bill Jordan (2010)	This, for a social democrat, is one of the most important questions – why did a consensual approach which rebuffs both left and right ideologies fail? Was it the absence of a serious approach? Or are we doomed to be tribal?
Common Ground – democracy and collectivity in an age of individualism Jeremy Gilbert	The title certainly points to what I consider the central dilemma of our times – although Gilbert's language is too suffused with French "constructivist" thinking to make much sense to me….

(2013)	
Unaccountable – how the elite brokers corrupt; Janine Wedel (2014)	Wedel is an anthropologist – and applies those skills to the contemporary political system of the USA
Rebalancing Society – radical renewal beyond left, right and center Henry Mintzberg (2015)	One of my favourite little books which I've brought in as a measure for the other books. He's basically got it all – strong analysis of what's wrong; recognition of the importance of worker coops and social enterprise; and of the need for a shift in power
Back to the future of Socialism Peter Hain (2015)	Most of the books in the table are by academics but this one is by that rarity – a thoughtful and caring politician. The title is a reference to the classic 1956 "Future of Socialism" and is a useful update – although it has been criticised for being too much of a defence of NewLabour
Reclaiming the State – a progressive vision of sovereignty in a post neo-liberal world Bill Mitchell and Thomas Fazi (2017)	I like the look of this book – written by an Australian economist- which, unusually for the time, argued for a more activist role for the state. His co-author, interestingly, is an Italian journalist. It's just that I get impatient with economic arguments these days
A Research Agenda for Neoliberalism Kean Birch (2017)	Seems to be one of these rare clearly- written books which asks the questions citizens want answers to. He seems to be a sociologist?
Wrong Turnings – how the left got lost; Geoff Hodgson (2018)	Hodgson is both a political economist and social democrat and has a strong analysis here
Why the Left Loses – the decline of the centre left in comparative perspective; R Manwaring and P Kennedy (2018)	The classic book on social democracy (Berman) was published 15 years ago. This is a more recent assessment from Australians which looks at the lessons from recent experience. See reading list here
Is Socialism Feasible? Geoffrey Hodgson (2019)	Hodgson writes clearly - and is prepared to face hard truths
From What Is to What If – unleashing the power of imagination to create the world we want Rob Hopkins (2019).	Hopkins is an environmental activist who founded the Resilient Towns movement.
The Demons of Liberal Democracy; Adrian Pabst (2019)	Pabst is a Third Way man who abhors left and right. I felt this would challenge some of my preconceptions
Winners take all – the elite charade of changing the world; A Girdiharadas (2019)	One of the problems progressives have is that the devil has stolen a lot of his tunes.
Goliath – the 100-year war between monopoly power and democracy; Matt Stoller (2019)	very important review suggests the author has swallowed the liberal competition ideas of economists too literally; and has underestimated the power of class struggle in the post-war US achievements
The Free Society in Crisis; David Starkey (2019)	Have included this curious book largely from admiration of the author's courage in limiting his reading list to books that are more than 50 years old
The evolution of communitarian ideas – history, theory and practice Henry Tam (2019)	Communitarianism is an important strand of progressive thought Tam is a very thoughtful and excellent writer who blogs here
The Third Pillar – how the market and the state leave the community behind Raghuram Rajan (2019)	an overdue analysis of the huge role which community bodies have to play in the future which was all too easily dismissed by the loose talk of "The Third Way" and the "Big Society". Although we do have to ask why it is that ideas apparently attractive to mainstream opinion were never taken seriously....
The New Class War – saving democracy from the new managerial elite; Michael Lind	I want to like this book – but feel the argument that managerial power needs taking down is hardly likely in itself to lead to the rebalance of power we need

(2020)	
Twenty-First Century Socialism; Jeremy Gilbert (2020)	This is a short and very readable book.
Unrigged – how Americans are battling back to save democracy; David Daley (2020)	The book may have a focus on the US but the move to discredit democracy and disenfranchise voters is widespread (eg contemporary UK) as is evident from books with titles such as "Against Democracy" (2016)
Rentier Capitalism – who owns the economy? Brett Christophers (2020)	A British economist gives us a good sense of the curious direction the British economy has taken. Strongly influenced by the work of US economist Michael Hudson, famous for his "Killing the Host" and "J is for Junk Economics"
Futures of Socialism – the pandemic and the post-Corbyn Era; ed G Blakewell (2020)	A series of short, succinct statements from pro-Corbyn social scientists working in the UK. Gives a very good sense of what is currently fashionable
Authoritarianism and how to counter it; Bill Jordan (2020)	The sociology author of "Why the Third Way failed" takes on the question of why voters have turner again to "the hard men" and what we can do about it…
Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century ; Andreas Malm (2020)	Malm is a Swedish economic historian/ecologist who has become, in the past decade, one of the most radical of the global warming campaigners. In this latest book, he explores the very different paths governments have taken faced with the Corona and Climate challenges; and maps out a very different route… There's an interesting interview with him here
Go Big Ed Miliband	https://bostonreview.net/politics/martin-oneill-go-big-ed-miliband
Share the Wealth – how to end rentier capitalism; Philippe Askenazy (2021)	Too many anglo-saxon economists dominate this field – so it's good to get a French view (a translation of a 2016 book)
Mission Economy – a moonshot guide to changing capitalism; Mariana Mazzucato (2021)	This Italian economist now based in Britain is one of the few economists who has been prepared to argue strongly for public investment and an activist role for government – see also Bill Mitchell (above) and Andrew Cumbers
Consequences of Capitalism; Noam Chomsky and Mary Waterstone (2021)	Very disappointing book – based on recent lectures delivered by Chomsky. And it shows….with the narrative often jumping into distracting stories.
Post Growth – life after capitalism ; Tim Jackson (2021)	The elephant in the room….a suitable note on which to finish Written in a refreshingly accessible style
The Return of the State – re-structuring Britain for the Common Good Ed P Allen et al (2021)	A book calling for a rethink on globalisation and the place of financial capital – with contributions from people such as Robert Skidelsky, Ann Pettifor and Stewart Lansley – questioning the role of financial capital.

Seven Ways to change the World?

I've managed to keep my head down and get a sense of the first 6/7 books in my list of some 30 I felt I needed to look at to spark off some movement in my brain cells as I try to write a satisfactory conclusion to the text I've been working on for some years about the various global crises we confront.

These are the books – and my initial reactions…

Title	What I make of them
Development Betrayed – the end of progress and a coevolutionary revisioning of the future; Richard Norgaard (1994)	A book ahead of its time – with its distaste for modernity and progress and our loss of community. It's strong on the philosophical mistakes we've made but the gloom of its first half made it difficult to sustain the reading. Need to return for the positive messages
The Third Way and Beyond – criticisms, futures and alternatives ed Hale, Leggett and Martell (2004)	There was a moment in the late 1990s when the idea of "stakeholding" (Hirst; Hutton) offered a different concept of the company and of capitalism – but Tony Blair blew the opportunity. I've just come across this book – which seems to capture the possibilities of that time…..
Common Ground – democracy and collectivity in an age of individualism Jeremy Gilbert (2013)	The title certainly points to what I consider the central dilemma of our times – although Gilbert's language is too suffused with French "constructivist" thinking to make much sense to me….
Unaccountable – how the elite brokers corrupt; Janine Wedel (2014)	Wedel is an anthropologist – and gives a powerful account here of the corruption at the heart of the American economic and political system. A bit light on prescriptions
Rebalancing Society – radical renewal beyond left, right and center Henry Mintzberg (2015)	One of my favourite little books which I've brought in as a measure for the other books. He's basically got it all – strong analysis of what's wrong; recognition of the importance of worker coops and social enterprise; and of the need for a shift in power
Back to the future of Socialism Peter Hain (2015)	Most of the books in the table are by academics but this one is by that rarity – a thoughtful and caring politician. The title is a reference to the classic 1956 "Future of Socialism" and is a useful update – although it has been criticised for being too much of a defence of New Labour
Reclaiming the State – a progressive vision of sovereignty in a post neo-liberal world Bill Mitchell and Thomas Fazi (2017)	written by an Australian economist and Italian journalist, this is an excellent analysis of the various forces which both weakened the state and strengthened the forces of privilege and reaction You get the sense that leftist parties and governments just rolled over…The last half of the book focuses on 3 issues – modern monetary theory, UBI and nationalisation

As usual, however, I've been diverted by other tantalising titles – not least Gordon Brown's new book "Seven Way to Change the World"

> I have always had mixed feelings about Brown - admiration at one level for his mind but awareness that he could be a bit clunky and overwhelming.
> I still have memories of going to meet him for lunch in 1974 when he had invited me to contribute to his famous "Red Paper on Scotland" . I had just been elected to one of the top positions in Europe's largest Region and he, I was thinking at the time, is a bit of a young upstart - being talked about even in his early 20s as a future Prime Minister.
> But I must have hidden such feelings well - since he asked me a few years later to write one of the chapters of a book he and Robin Cook edited about inequality in "Scotland; the Real Divide".
> He may have been out of power now for more than a decade - but he is extraordinarily well-connected to the global intellectual elite and, if anyone's capable, of getting their mind around the key issues

confronting us, it's him.

My gut feeling is that he is too much of an ivory-tower "policy wonk" to be able to communicate with us - but the title he's chosen shows that he knows he's got to get the level right.....even if the sub-title "how to fix the most pressing problems we face" is a bit hubristic.

But this was ever Gordon's problem – a confidence that targets and incentives could fix problems….

Interesting to see that the phrase also creeps into the title also of Ed Miliband's new book….

What does this say?

Other tempting titles are -

Title	Why the book seems relevant
Rethinking Governance – the centrality of the State; S Bell and A Hindmoor (2009)	It was a rare voice in those days actually making the case for strategic government
Power and Love – the theory and practice of social change; Adam Kahane (2010)	One of 3 important books I missed in those years demonstrating the lessons the burgeoning social movement offered for a revitalised democratic practice – Kahane being now a Canadian consultant in reconciliation and change
Can Democracy be Saved? Participation, deliberation, social movements; Della Porta (2013)	Della Porta is Italian and one of the world's most prolific writers on social movements
Waves of Democracy – social movements and political change; John Markoff (1996 - 2013)	And Markoff is a Pittsburgh Prof of political science
Dangerous Years – climate change, the long emergency and the way forward; David W Orr (2016)	David Orr is one of the most serious academic ecologists. This interview gives a good sense of the book's argument
Human Scale Revisited – a new look at the classic case for a decentralist future; Kirkpatrick Sale (2017)	An "updating" of an important 1950s book which has long fascinated me – the short review in the title link indicates that the update actually goes back to the 1970s only
Democracy and Prosperity – reinventing capitalism through the century of turbulence T Iversen and D Soskice (2019)	This is a pretty academic book – taking us through the very important literature on "Varieties of Capitalism"
Reimagining Capitalism in a World on Fire; Rebecca Henderson (2020)	A powerful book which pursues the critical question of whether capitalism can actually change for the better. Henderson thinks it can – an argument I look forward to hearing!
Inequality and the labyrinths of democracy; Goeran Therborn (2020)	The possibility that capitalism is inconsistent with democracy has become an increasingly loud question in recent years – and is here magisterially addressed
Community Wealth-Building J Guinan and M O'Neill (2020)	
Market Economy, Market Society; interviews and essays on the future of European social democracy; ed M Adereth (2021)	What looks a fascinating contribution to the discussion from the Iberian peninsula
Seven Ways to Change the World – how to fix the world's most pressing problems; G Brown (2021)	Brown is the most serious and well-read of global ex-leaders –as is shown in this excellent review
Go Big – how to fix our world; Ed Miliband (2021)	Miliband doesn't quite have his gravitas – but gets a suitably serious assessment analysis from the other side of the Atlantic here

A New Class War??

I've been looking for some time for a book which does justice to our fall from innocence in the 1970s. I start from JK Galbraith's concept of "**countervailing power**" which sustained the post-war period in western development. This was the theory that the corporate, union and social power held each other, for a "**glorious 30 years**", in a certain balance until 1980 – with results good for everyone.

That balance was **destroyed** by something we too easily try to explain away by the use of the meaningless phrase "neoliberalism". I'm familiar with the various efforts a range of social scientists have made to put meat on that particular bone – such as Philip Mirowski, Vivian Schmidt and, more recently, Quinn Slobodian.

But, for my money "Licence to be Bad; how economics corrupted us" by Jonathan Aldred (2019) offers the most readable explanation of how we have all succumbed in the past 40 years to a new highly individualistic and greedy virus…..

And it was Henry Mintzberg who drew attention in 1996 to the fact that, when communism fell in 1989, it was a countervailing power we lost – one that had kept the greed in check. His "Managing government, governing management" paper is superbly annotated here.

His "Rebalancing Society" which he first issued almost a decade ago can be read here

The question which has been gnawing at me since the start of the new millennium is what can be done to put a new system of countervailing power in place…..????

Until now, few books dared raise or pursue that question, But Michael Lind's The New Class War – saving democracy from the new managerial elite (2020) offers to do precisely that……

It starts powerfully –

> *Demagogic populism is a symptom. Technocratic neoliberalism is the disease. Democratic pluralism is the cure.*

before reminding us that -

> *In the 19th and early twentieth centuries, **five major schools of thought debated the future of industrial society: liberalism, producerism, socialism, corporatism, and pluralism (p39)***
>
> *……Producerism is the belief that the economy should be structured by the state to maximize the numbers of self-employed family farmers, artisans, and small shopkeepers in society. The moral ideal of this school is the self-sufficient citizen of a republic with a small-producer majority whose economic independence means that they cannot be intimidated or blackmailed by wealthy elites. In the form of Jeffersonian agrarianism, producerism has a rich history in the United States. The rise of mass production in the economy, and the shift from a majority made up of farm owners and farm workers to urban wage earners, rendered the producerist ideal irrelevant in the modern industrialized West. While small-producerism still has appeal to romantics on both the left and the right, it is and will remain anachronistic, and having criticized it elsewhere, I will not discuss it in this book.4*
>
> *….. A fourth philosophy, opposed to free market liberalism and state socialism alike, envisioned a harmonious society of state-supervised but largely self-governing "**corporations," by which was meant entire economic sectors, not individual firms, rather like medieval guilds.6 This tradition influenced Catholic social thought**, as expressed in the papal encyclicals Rerum novarum (1891) and*

Quadragesimo anno (1931). For the French sociologist Émile Durkheim and others in the secular French republican solidarist tradition, the organization of labor and business could be an antidote to "anomie," a phrase Durkheim devised to describe the isolation and disorientation of many individuals in urban industrial societies.7 The same term, "corporatism," is often used for both democratic and dictatorial versions of this political tradition

*..... The view of society as a community of self-organized and self-governing communities, under the supervision of a democratic government, is best described as "pluralism," the term used by the **English pluralists of the early twentieth century, like Neville Figgis, F. W. Maitland, G. D. H. Cole, and Harold Laski, and by their late-twentieth century heirs, including Paul Hirst and David Marquand***.

And then goes on to argue that –

Only a new democratic pluralism that compels managerial elites to share power with the multiracial, religiously pluralistic working class in the economy, politics, and the culture can end the cycle of oscillation between oppressive technocracy and destructive populism.

Further Reading
This critical [review argues that Lind fails to do justice](#) to the extensive writings on social democracy

Lind does not know, or chooses to ignore, the tradition of democratic socialist social theory. He refers to the system of compromise between workers and the elites as 'democratic pluralism'. We do not see any reference to the classics of political sociology or political economy that have presented a much more nuanced analysis of the temporary democratic class compromise of the Twentieth Century (Berman 2006; Korpi 1983; Przeworski 1985; Therborn 1977).

Since Lind does not build on established political economy, his concepts are underwhelming. The ruling class outlined in his book, for example, is rather broad. Lind suggests that the ruling class comprises a segment of the professional elite that provides institutional leaders, comprising roughly the top 15% of society. On this definition, a black teacher with a degree, for example, would be a member of the ruling class, while a gas-fitter contractor employing six workers would be considered 'underclass.' This is absurd, even if access to education has indeed become a crucial class-forming factor. At one point, Lind himself admits that the real driving-force behind economic and power inequalities is 'not knowledge capital, but good old economic capital' (p. 120).
If he sees this so well, then it is unclear why economic-financial capital is missing from his class theory. Lind tends to use the 'working class' and 'white workers' interchangeably. Lind writes that while the elites' multiculturalism is open to recognising minority identities, it is simultaneously hostile to white subcultures' traditions. As Anand Giridharadas pointed it out in his criticism in the New York Times, it is hard to see how exactly neoliberalism oppresses whites (Giridharadas 2020).

And [this review in Jacobin](#) considers that Lind confuses culture wars with class war.

Windows of Change

One of the issues which fascinates me is social change – how alliances can and do reach sufficient "critical mass" to force governments to change direction. My background is political science but, when in 1990 I moved into consultancy on "capacity development" I did my homework on the "change management" literature which was then so fashionable.

The pandemic has given us a "new kid on the block" to contend with – the social network theorists - whose father and inspiration has been Spanish sociology Professor Manuel Castells.

"The Rules of Contagion - why things spread and Why they Stop" by Adam Kucharski (2020) is typical of this new genre. It's actually been lying on my shelves for a few weeks and it is only a much-hyped book by Damon Centola "**Change – how to make Big Things Happen**" which has made me aware of the questions now being raised in this field.

Centola is a Professor (of Sociology in a school of Communications and Engineering) who has done a lot of work on both social movements and epidemiology – so clearly has something to say and I will read the book carefully.

Indeed I can already spot where I need to amend my own theory of change which currently runs as follows -

> "I have a theory of change which emphasises the individual, moral responsibility as well as the dynamic of the crowd. Most of the time our systems seem impervious to change – but always (and suddenly) an opportunity arises. Those who **care about the future of their society, prepare for these "windows of opportunity".** And the preparation is about analysis, mobilisation and integrity.
>
> ·   It is about us caring enough about our organisation and society to speak out about the need for change.
> ·   It is about taking the trouble to think and read about ways to improve things – and
> ·   To help create and run networks of such change
> ·   which mobilise social forces
> ·   And it is about establishing a **personal reputation for probity and good judgement**
> ·   that **people will follow your lead** when that window of opportunity arises".

Centola's presentation presents evidence which disputes that final point – showing that key actors in the Egyptian Spring with such reputations failed a week before the crucial catalyst. The key events were triggered by others.....One of his central points is that social change

> "*is not about information……it's about norms……social networks are not merely the pipes…but the prisms that determine how we see those behaviours and interpret the ideas*"

I'll let you know more about the book once I get through it…..

afterthought;

The last book I read about networks was probably Niall Ferguson's The Square and the Tower – networks, hierarchies and the struggle for global power (2017) which was actually a historian's fascinating take on the issue. My comments on the book ranged pretty widely and had more to do with my own discovery of the importance of networks but a subsequent post referred to an author who isn't referenced in Ferguson's copious notes but who helps place the idea of networks in a far more insightful context than Ferguson – namely Tribes, institutions, markets,

networks – a framework for societal evolution by David Ronfeldt (RAND Corporation 1996). It's an important article which argues that each form is necessary – one does not replace the other….With a great table of which I have selected some excerpts -

Comparison of the 4 models

	Tribe/clan	Institution	market	Network
Key realm	Family/culture	State/government	economy	Civil society
Essential feature	Give sense of identity	Exercise authority	Allow free transactions	Share knowledge
Key Value	Belonging	Order	freedom	equality?
Key risk	Nepotism	Corruption	exploitation	Group think
Identity	Solidarity	Sovereignty	competition	Cooperation
Motivation	Survival	Rules	Self-interest	Group empowerment
structure	Acephalous	Hierarchical	atomised	Flat

Tipping Point at 21

I've now finished Damon Centola's "**Change – how to make Big Things Happen**" and am trying to understand how it relates to the huge literature which exploded in the 1990s on "change management" – something which the author himself sadly fails to do. **Perhaps he feels that the arrival of social media has so revolutionised the world as to make that literature old hat and not even worthy of mention??**

More than 20 years ago I took the opportunity of what was euphemistically called "resting" between gigs to to summarise the key messages of that literature (in a chapter of In Transit – notes on Good Governance pp177-202) That gives a useful sense of what the debate was like in those days – but didn't include the writings of my favourite Robert Quinn whose "Change the World" (2000) was published too late for inclusion (I really need to update "In Transit")

I'm **not** a fan of strongly-marketed books which describe experiments conducted by psychologists and data-scientists – particularly when they trumpet how these dismantle myths that have apparently long held us in their grip - perhaps I'm overly suspicious that such experiments have not been properly peer-reviewed. Rutger Bregman's recent Humankind did a great hatchet-job on many such experiments – so much so that I set them all out in a table you can find here

But, as I said in the last post, Centola's book **raises important questions about the process of social change** – even if some of the examples he uses seem a bit trivial - with a bit too much use, for my liking, of trending on Twitter and Facebook.
But the way he uses real-life examples of health-care in Africa; the Manhatten. Apollo and Genome projects; the "Black Lives Matter" campaign; and solar energy uptake to develop **ideas about what approaches to social change work – and why** – is thought-provoking.

The new element, of course, which the data-scientists bring to bear to the subject is the number-crunching power which cheaper computers now bring to bear on Big Data.

139

The field of change management is dominated by a famous book published in 2000 - [The Tipping Point](#) in which essayist Malcolm Gladwell argued that the point at which something – a product or idea – tips into fashion requires the confluence of a number of influential types of people - not just a single "leader". Many trends are ushered into popularity by small groups of individuals that he classified as Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen.

> *Connectors are individuals who have ties in many different realms and act as conduits between them, helping to engender connections, relationships, and "cross-fertilization" that otherwise might not have ever occurred.*
> *Mavens are people who have a strong compulsion to help other consumers by helping them make informed decisions.*
> *Salesmen are people whose unusual charisma allows them to be extremely persuasive in inducing others to take decisions and change their behaviour.*

"Stickiness" is an important concept for these discussions - the quality that compels people to pay close, sustained attention to a product, concept, or idea. Stickiness is hard to define, and its presence or absence often depends heavily on context. Often, the way that it is generated is unconventional, unexpected, and contrary to received wisdom. **Context** is enormously important in determining whether a particular phenomenon will tip into widespread popularity. Even minute changes in the environment can play a major factor in the propensity of a given concept attaining the tipping point.

I'm not sure if Centola's new book actually adds all that much to the discussion although his opening point is clearly an important one – that the spreading of ideas is NOT like a virus (in which loose, casual connectors are crucial to the spreading of disease). To change behaviour (or norms) - as social campaigns attempt – requires a very different approach – one which depends on mutual support

His work suggests that the process of change can be quantified – **and that the "tipping point" for change is when 25% of a relevant population starts to adjust its behaviour**. But otherwise his reference to "relevance" is not all that different from Gladwell's rather vague use of "context" - although I did enjoy the metaphors Centola uses for different strategies – "shotgun", "silver bullet" and "snowball" – with his suggestion that the latter is **generally the most successful in maximising the concentrated force of related people**.

His concluding chapter tried to leave us [with 7 strategies](#) but is very weak – you rather feel he ran out of energy,

Other Recommended Reading
[How Change Happens](#); Duncan Green (2016)
[How Change Happens – why some social movements succeed while others don't](#) ; Leslie Crutchfield (2018)
Duncan [Green's comment on the 2018](#) book
This looks a pretty thorough treatment of [the Psychology of social change](#)

CHANGE

We have a strange, ambivalent attitude to change – at one level we complain that the world is speeding up but, at another, we celebrate growth, speed and change and have a horror of Luddism and entropy. About the only positive examples in our society of slow movers are Aesop's tortoise and the SlowFood movement. One of the positive consequences of the pandemic is that it has made us question some aspects of this eg globalisation –

Our **constant preoccupation with what is new and modern** has a name – "neophilia" – which
- makes us too easily the prey of the latest political and intellectual fashions
- we drift into without exploring why we dropped our previous enthusiasm
- develops in us what Clive James called "cultural amnesia" – an almost fatal inability to look back at what people much wiser than us were saying in previous generations

Probably the most useful 60-page article you can read on the subject is How Change Happens - Interdisciplinary Perspectives for Human Development; Roman Krznaric (2007) which tries to summarise how a range of disciplines thought about the question – in the early part of the millennium.

Part 1 describes different approaches to how change happens from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. These include, among others, history, politics, sociology, psychology, economics, international relations, legal studies, and ecology. Each discipline has its own distinctive approach; for instance, political scientists are interested in transformations of political systems, psychologists in individual behaviour, sociologists in worldviews. The section highlights the general factors and conceptual frameworks used to explain change, not empirical content.

The second part sets out a tool for thinking about change, drawing on the various perspectives described in Part 1 – in the form of a table called 'The rough guide to how change happens'. It then examines an example of major social change – the abolition of the slave trade and slavery in Britain – which illustrates the utility of the 'rough guide' as a tool for understanding and explaining how change takes place.

The third part of the paper explores the extent to which contemporary development strategies to tackle poverty and inequality employ the full range of approaches to change proposed in the 'rough guide'. It examines strategies such as managing markets, reforming the state, empowerment, and corporate social responsibility, and traces them back to their roots in particular academic disciplines.

I conclude that current development thinking makes use of only a narrow range of possible approaches to change. The result is that development strategies are limited in five main ways:
- they are excessively reformist and insensitive to underlying power and inequality;
- they largely ignore environmental issues;
- they overlook the importance of personal relationships and promoting mutual understanding as a strategy of change;
- they fail to fully appreciate the contextual factors that limit change;
- and they lack a multidisciplinary agility to draw on the broad range of approaches to change that exist outside the narrow confines of development studies.

Overall there is a need for broader thinking about how change does happen so that we can be more creative and adept at devising strategies to confront the enormous challenges facing our societies and planet.

5. Postmodernity Diversion

I used to call this the "whatever….." era because disputes seemed immaterial. Except that the world has just got more polarised. That wasn't supposed to happen!
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2020/01/post-modernism-what-is-it-and-does-it.html

Title	Takeaway
Remembering Richard Hoggart	I receive a challenge which takes me to the unusual field (for me) of literary theory; to an exploration of my indifference to novels; and, with some horror, to cultural studies
Spirit of the Times	When and why were the labels of "modernity" and post-modernity first invented – and does it matter?
A Plus for Postmodernism	Amongst a lot of turgid reading on the topic, I discover a gem – "The Saturated Self" by Kenneth Gergen
Postmodernity – another go	I use my own life in an effort to understand the terms
Postmodernity – WTF	I actually understood what PM was all about from my teens – but it's the "Post-Truth" discussion that's made me realise its significance
Turning Points	In which I try to answer the question of whether we're at the start of a new era

Remembering Richard Hoggart

I have a young Bulgarian journalist friend who has a multilingual blog The Bridge of Friendship about cross-border issues. He's based in his home town of Russe on the Danube – a selection of the earlier posts can be read here.
We chat frequently and he has taken recently to posing what he calls "challenges" – when he presents, in a few phrases, a new issue which he needs to explore. This wrenches me out of my usual channels and has me musing about things which normally pass me by.
And this was particularly true of the latest one he threw at me – about the sociology of literature or was it literary theory – or indeed critical theory? Is there a difference? And does it matter?

As I'm not a fan of novels, this was a tough one. But then I remembered the reason for my dislike of English novels and their boring portrayal of the various dilemmas of middle-class characters….it's the **narrowness of the social context which turns me off** – **in contrast with the dynamism I find in Scottish and Irish writing** – let alone French and German cultural icons.

Take the Germans first – I was still in my early 20s when I first came across artists such as Georg Grosz and Kathe Kollwitz and writers such as Bert Brecht and Heinrich Boell – all profoundly influenced by the experience of war and exploitation, the first three angrily whereas Boell's stories were more resigned. Michel Houllebecq's novels react against consumer capitalism where JG Ballard's tales show the threatening dystopia.

In picking out such artists I simply show my **own preference not just for critical narrative but for stories to be set against a social context**. Other people are different – they don't like to be reminded of such realities – preferring more magical tales….Where does that get us?

In 2014, Michael Schmidt produced a 1,200 page book called "The Novel; a biography" which discussed the plots of hundreds of writers – grouping them into strange categories such as

> THE HUMAN COMEDY: Victor Hugo, Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola
> IMPERFECTION: George Eliot, Louisa May Alcott, George Gissing, Samuel Butler
> BRAVERIES: Robert Louis Stevenson, Bruce Chatwin, William Morris, Charles Kingsley, Henry Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling
> SMOKE AND MIRRORS: Lewis Carroll, Bram Stoker, Oscar Wilde, Athur Conan Doyle, J. M. Barrie, Max Beerbohm, Kenneth Grahame
> PESSIMISTS: Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane
> LIVING THROUGH IDEAS: Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy

A book I read with some interest a few years back was Grand Hotel Abyss – the lives of the Frankfurt school; by Stuart Jefferies (2015). For me, Erich Fromm was the most interesting of the group but he soon parted company with them. Jefferies' Intro to his book is useful as it reminds us that -

> *The School came into being in part to try to understand failure, in particular the failure of the German Revolution in 1919. As it evolved during the 1930s, it married neo-Marxist social analysis to Freudian psychoanalytical theories to try to understand why German workers, instead of freeing themselves from capitalism by means of socialist revolution, were seduced by modern consumer capitalist society and, fatefully, Nazism.*
> *The School was forced to leave Germany in 1933 – for the USA and, while in Los Angeles exile in the 1940s, Adorno helped develop the California F-scale, a personality test designed to discover those likely to fall prey to fascist or authoritarian delusions. Breivik would have been the perfect example of the authoritarian personality Adorno wrote about, one who was 'obsessed with the apparent decline of traditional standards, unable to cope with change, trapped in a hatred of all those not deemed part of the in-group and prepared to take action to "defend" tradition against degeneracy'.*

But Herbert Marcuse was the only one of the group to take a revolutionary path – remaining in the States and supporting the students during the 1968 unrest.
What I find most curious is that **the ultimate legacy of the Frankfurt School was not actually in the field of literature but** - in popular culture. This is what fascinated the group in 1950s America – and spawned the discipline of Cultural Studies - started in the UK by Richard Hoggart in 1964 but whose biggest star was Stuart Hall. The Frankfurt school may have shown an initial interest in people like George Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann who were trying to develop a sociology of the novel but soon veered into polling work on the authoritarian personality….

I came to adulthood in the late 1950s – just as the New Left was getting off the ground. I remember the impact Hoggart's "The Uses of Literacy" (1957) made with its picture of the resilience of working-class culture and the threat posed by the banality of "popular culture" – as

well as the excitement as I held in 1960/61 the first few issues of "New Left Review" in my hands after its creation from "New Reasoner" and "Universities and Left Review".
The wider global context is nicely caught in the diagrams in this short paper

But Cultural Studies has probably done more harm than good – **it was certainly the means through which the issue of identity came to the fore and destroyed the left**. Richard Hoggart is, for me, an immensely important – if rather neglected – figure in the story. Raymond Williams is the man who attracts the adulation these days from the trendies – perhaps because he is so high-falutin' and boring!

So what do I take from this canter down Memory Lane? What lessons about culture? About the left? About the UK? Well, my prejudices are still intact – I find it curious that anyone can take writers such Goldmann, Lukacs and Williams seriously….

On the other hand, I realise that I have neglected Richard Hoggart for too long. He was a superbly sensitive writer whose various autobiographies (he lived to the grand old age of 95!) are beautifully written – you can get a sense from some excerpts from A Measured Life – the times and places of an orphaned intellectual; R Hoggart (1994; 2019)
And I'm delighted to see that he's still celebrated today – see this recent article in the Los Angeles Review of Books

Further Reading
Understanding Richard Hoggart – a pedagogy of hope M Bailey, B Clarke, J Walton (2011)
Richard Hoggart and Cultural Studies ed S Owen (2008)
a review of the above book
Rereading Richard Hoggart ed Sue Owen (2008) some excerpts of a more personal tribute
"Promises to keep – thoughts in old age"; R Hoggart (2005)
Cultural Studies 1983 – a theoretical introduction; Stuart Hall et al (2016) which contained the lecture series he gave in the US in that year which was issued only two years after his death
The Novel; a biography; Michael Schmidt (2014)
A few hours later, I got an alert from Academia about a short article called "To critique or to criticise" which led me in turn to a fascinating 2016 book by a critic with the wonderful title "Better living through Criticism – how to think about art, pleasure, beauty and truth"

Spirit of the Times

"Modernism" is the label we stick on the cultural and intellectual genie which was released by industrialisation from the middle of the 19th Century - although [Virginia Woolf insists it came later](). In many ways "[The Manifesto of the Communist Party]" (1848) marks the start of what was to be a very turbulent century

> The cultural aspects are superbly described in Peter Gay's [Modernism – the lure of heresy](2007) which has a superb 32 page bibliographical essay. The intellectual/political aspects of modernism probably require both [The Crisis of Reason – European thought 1848-1914] by JM Burrows (2001) and [Contesting Democracy – political ideas in the 20th Century] by Jan Werner-Mueller (2011)

There is some dispute about when Modernism eventually gave way to Post-modernism - with Perry Anderson's [The Origins of Postmodernity] (1999) doing the most thorough detective work. [This timeline] tracks down a reference by C Wright Mills in 1958 – but most people now accept that Daniel Bell's use of the phrase "post-industrial" in 1960 signalled the birth-pangs of post-modernism with [The Temporary Society] by Warren Bennis and Philip Slater (1968); [The Age of Discontinuity]; by Peter Drucker 1969 and [Between Two Ages - America's Role in the Technetronic Era] by Zbigniev Brzezinski (1970) best capturing the transition pains…

I've made a couple of efforts to make sense of Post-Modernism – with [my last attempt] selecting what I considered to be the more accessible of what is a very turgid field of study. This was probably the [best summary I came across].

I'm encouraged to return to the fray by a book which came out recently with the title [~~Cynical Critical~~ Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everybody] (2020) by Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay

This looks to help those of us who are puzzled by the way that both hard left and hard right seem engaged in [a new Culture War] – with the **clear progress which has been made toward racial and gender equality not apparently being enough to satisfy significant numbers who are taking to the streets and toppling statues…..**Is this just impatience – or is there more to it than that. Pluckrose and Lindsay think the latter. Here's how the they start -

> A fundamental change in human thought took place in the 1960s. This change is associated with several French Theorists who, while not quite household names, float at the edges of the popular imagination, among them Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard. Taking a radically new conception of the world and our relationship to it, it revolutionized social philosophy and perhaps social everything. **Over the decades, it has dramatically altered not only what and how we think but also how we think about thinking**. Esoteric, academic, and seemingly removed from the realities of daily existence, this revolution has nevertheless had profound implications for how we interact with the world and with one another. At its heart is a radical worldview that came to be known as "postmodernism."
>
> Ultimately, **the Enlightenment that postmodernists rejected** is defined by a belief in objective knowledge, universal truth, science (or evidence more broadly) as a method for obtaining objective knowledge, the power of reason, the ability to communicate straightforwardly via language, a universal human nature, and individualism. They also rejected the belief that the West has experienced significant progress due to the Enlightenment and will continue to do so if it upholds

these values

When I'm being flippant, I refer to Postmodernism as the "whatever" school – since its proponents use that phrase and a shrug of their shoulders to express their contempt for the poor souls who still believe in objectivity or searching for "truth".
Personally I have a lot of time for people who insist on looking at the world with multi-angled prisms – I posted once about 57 varieties of capitalism.
But that doesn't make me a relativist! I respect too much the process of trying to disprove falsities…
And, in all the discussion, I can't understand why no one refers to the classic book on this subject which was came out years before French deconstructionists were even heard of – The Social Construction of Reality by T Luckman and Peter Berger (1966)

A Plus for Postmodernism

My foray, these past few days, into "the literature" of postmodernism has provoked two thoughts –
the first the (flippant) question of **why on earth these guys can't agree their terminology**.
What are we actually talking about - is it critical theory? literary theory? structural theory? Constructivism? Deconstructionism? Postmodernism? postmodernity?
Why so many different words? I know they're trying to tell us that words are meaningless…but hey, I'm getting confused!
Confused people, of course, tend to lash out. And there's a lot of anger in the air – so maybe that's why we're angry!!

The second thought is a discovery - that **the trawling through the most significant commentaries on the field** (Perry Anderson, Peter Berger, Marshall Berman, Chris Butler ("A Short Intro to Post Modernity"), Terry Eagleton, David Harvey) **unearthed one real gem** – **The Saturated Self- dilemmas of identity in contemporary life (1991) by a well-read and good w**riter who happened to be a social psychologist, Kenneth Gergen who dramatically introduces his book thus -

> Many nonacademic readers are aware of the debates over the canons of Western literature now engulfing the academic community, and the increasing currency of such terms as de construction, poststructuralism, and postmodern. Yet these are meagre indications of the radical reconsideration of longstanding traditions of truth and knowledge which are underway.
> As beliefs in objective knowledge fall into disrepute, the entire face of education, science, and "knowledge-making in general stands to be altered. The issues are far too important, and too much fun, to be contained within the walls of academia.
> One aspect of this ferment is of special concern to me. For many years one of my central interests has been the concept of self, our ways of understanding who we are and what we are about. Beliefs about the self seem pivotal to all our undertakings. We believe that as normal human beings we possess reasoning powers, emotions, conscience, intentions; these beliefs are critical to the way we relate to others……

Remember this was written 20 years ago!!

It is not simply that the present turn of events has altered the emphasis placed on rationality, the emotions, and the like, or that it adds new concepts to the traditional vernacular. Rather, like the concepts of truth, objectivity, and knowledge, the very idea of individual selves—in possession of mental qualities—is now threatened with eradication.

I have just started reading the book – although [this excellent review has given me a good sense of the argument](#) - starting with the observation that a combination of modern transport systems and the internet have transformed how each of us relate to others and then moves to consider how this has affected the way we understand (or fail to!) the world.

The last post made the point that one of the aspects of Postmodernism with which I don't have a problem is its celebration of seeing the world from multiple perspectives – indeed I joked about my [57 varieties of capitalism](#). Even in 1991 Gergen accepted that our pursuit of progress was putting the very existence of the planet in danger - and argued that awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives could – if put into an appropriate decision structure - help give voice to marginalised groups.

In fact, a few years later, this is exactly what happened when a social anthropologist presented a fascinating case study of the process by which Arsenal Football Club found the site for its new stadium

which started off quite elegantly - just the market actor (Arsenal) and the hierarchical actor (Islington Council) - but was soon clumsified by the entry of an egalitarian actor (the Highbury Community Association). Association). The result was a solution, totally overlooked in the early stages, that gave each of these contending actors more of what it wanted (and less of what it did not want) than it would have got if it had somehow established hegemony and "gone it alone."

This "clumsy solution" came about more or less by accident, and it stands in marked contrast to the sort of outcomes that we usually get, especially in relation to policy issues that have a high scientific input: environment and development in the Himalayan region, for instance. All of which raises the question: "How can we get clumsy solutions by design." One important part of the answer is: "By doing pretty well the exact opposite of what policy orthodoxy says we should do." Rather than a single, agreed definition of the problem, we need to move towards noisy and argumentative institutional arrangements in which all three voices (each with its distinctive definition of the problem - a definition, moreover, that cannot be reconciled with the other two) are (a) able to make themselves heard and (b) are then responsive to one another.

Michael Thompson uses the "[grid-group" or "cultural analysis" approach which I've discussed before](#) on this blog – but sets it out much more clearly in [The Case for clumsiness](#) (2004)
The ideas were considered important enough to be presented by Professor Keith Grint in
"[Wicked problems and clumsy solutions – the role of leadership](#)" (2008)
Michael Thompson [was interviewed by the RSA here](#)

This tribute gives [a good sense of his work](#)

Update

I've been a bit remiss in not mentioning one book which is a model of clarity - From post-industrial society – post-modern society – new theories of the contemporary world; Krishan Kumar (2nd edition 2004) which follows an earlier 1978 book of his which looked at the post-industrial writers such as Daniel Bell and Alain Touraine who explored the move to a service economy and a 'knowledge society', and the social and political changes that could be expected to follow from this.

Those theories have been joined by others with a more ambitious scope about the information and communication revolution, the transformation of work and organization in the global economy; and of political ideologies and cultural beliefs

Postmodernity – starting again

These last 2 weeks I've been trying to **get my head around postmodernity/postmodernism** – or rather what the relevant "literature" seemed to be saying about it. An accident of birth had actually given me the **facility, from my mid-teens, of seeing the world through several lens**. Initially I experienced this as a difficult tension but that gradually gave way to a realisation that being able to look at the world from a variety of angles had its beneficial side. Like Monsieur Jourdain, I've been speaking prose all my life

This post is a continuation of the recent series of posts on postmodernism started here – in which I will try to bring my thoughts on the issue more clearly together. For reasons I can't quite explain, however, I feel it important that I first describe
-    my particular learning experience
-    the difficulties I've had in making sense of postmodernism

and then to explore the question of what follows postmodernism. This may take several posts…

   I received my education in a state school which still then possessed the positive features of Scotland's Democratic Tradition now, sadly, much traduced. It would have been easier for my parents to send me to the secondary school just a few blocks from our house but my father was a Presbyterian Minister and home was a manse (owned by the Church of Scotland) in the exclusive "West End" - so that school was fee-paying, if one in which I already had friends.
   And my parents (although no radicals) would never have contemplated taking a step which would have created a barrier with my father's congregation who were stalwarts of the town's lower middle classes with modest houses and apartments in the centre and east of the town.

   Thus began my familiarization with the nuances of the class system – and with the experience of straddling boundaries which was to become such a feature of my life. Whether the boundaries are those of class, party, professional group intellectual discipline or nation, they are well protected if not fortified…..And trying to straddle such borders – let alone explore them – can be an uncomfortable experience.

At University in the 60s I had been interested in how social systems held together - and in particular in why people (generally) obeyed those placed in authority above them - Max Weber's classification of political systems into – "traditional", "charismatic" and "rational-legal" was an eye-opener and gave me the first of many typologies I was to find myself using.

When I became a young councillor in 1968 (for the Catholic-dominated Labour party), I found myself torn between my loyalties to the local community activists on the one hand and those to my (older) political colleagues and officials on the other.

And I felt this particularly strongly when I was elevated to the ranks of magistrate and required to deal with the miscreants who confronted us as lay judges every Monday morning – up from the prison cells where they had spent the weekend for drunkenness and wife-beating……..

The collusion between the police and my legal adviser was clear but my role was to adjudicate "beyond reasonable doubt" and the weak police testimonials often gave me reason to doubt….I dare say I was too lenient and I certainly got such a reputation – meaning that I was rarely disturbed to sign search warrants!

And, on being elevated a few years later to **one of the leading positions in a giant new Region**, I soon had to establish relations with - and adjudicate between the budgetary and policy bids of - senior professionals heading specialized Departments with massive budgets and manpower.

It was at that stage that I developed a diagram for my students to make sense of the "conflict of loyalties" in what I saw as 4 very different sets of accountabilities to which politicians are subject –
- local voters (if the electoral system is based on local constituencies);
- the party (both local and national)
- the officials (and laws) of the particular government agency they had entered;
- their conscience.

Politicians, I argued, differ according to the extent of the notice they took of each of the pressures coming from each of these sources – and the loyalties this tended to generate. And I gave names to the 4 types which could be distinguished –
- "populist" – who articulated the stronger voices of the voters
- "ideologue" – who operated in the bubble of the party faithful
- "statesman" – who would try to extract the commonality from the multiple voices of professional advisers
- "maverick" – who tries to sort it out for him/herself

But, I argued, the effective politician is the one who resists the temptation to be drawn exclusively into any one of these roles. Each has its own important truth - but it is when someone blends the various partialities into a workable and acceptable proposition that we see real leadership. And I would make the same point about the different professional and academic disciplines.
Each generates its own way of looking at the world – as you will see from the table in this post which looks only at seven academic disciplines

Once we become aware of the very different worlds in which people live, our world suddenly becomes a very richer place – in which we have choices about the particular lens we use to make sense of it all…
I did the Belbin team test for the first time only in the new millennium – to discover that I was not the Leader I thought I was but, rather, a resource-person. And The Art of Thinking by Bramsall and Harrison (1984) very usefully sets out the very different ways each of us thinks. viz types of strategic thinking..How we see ourselves (and others see us) is a critical part of self-discovery - part of the Schumacher quote which figures in the "quotations" block which I've

just moved up to the 4th section of the long list which now stretches down the right-hand corner of the blog.

Postmodernity/postmodernism – WTF

Some readers may feel that these labels are pointless and, generally, I would agree..But, on this occasion, it seems rather important to [know if we are in a new era](#) - where the old assumptions which served us well in the past no longer work

So allow me to pursue these personal recollections – to see where they lead……

I don't think too many of us – if asked - would be able to give a convincing account of "postmodernity". And that certainly includes me.

Until recently I would have muttered something like "incoherent gibberish" as a comment and "anything goes" as an epitaph – **except that it hasn't really gone away. Arguably, with "post-truth", it is only now reaching its zenith….**

As Postmodernity is presumed to [have revealed itself just as I was starting university](#) (1960) and I didn't notice anything all that unusual until sometime in the new millennium, this suggests a certain carelessness – if not insouciance - on my part.

Although I can always plead that I haven't lived in Western Europe for the past 30 years!

But did we ever understand what "modernity" was about? And when did we first become aware that it was no more?

It's interesting that it was 1982 before clear explanation was published - with Marshall Berman's "[All that is Solid Melts into Air](#)" – a quotation, of course, from Karl Marx whose "Communist Manifesto" launched the age of modernity. But I for one didn't came across the book until the last decade or so. Oh - and modernity, for him, was the combustion engine, electricity, trains, speed, ideology etc

In 1972 I set up a Local Government Unit at Paisley College of Technology which basically allowed me to use my position as a reforming politician in a shipbuilding town to present and explore the odd mixture of ideas about **rationality, participation, positive discrimination which were wafting their way across the Atlantic**…..The very phrase "maximum feasible participation" of the poor indicated how radical the efforts were…

The Unit's papers and seminars achieved sufficient success to allow the powers-that- be to give me a sabbatical for 4 years to try to consolidate its position.

I have to confess that I repaid their faith with lethargy – the powerful position I held as one of the leaders of Strathclyde Region (which had half of the Scottish Office budget and managed half of the professional employed in Scotland) just took up too much of my time.

Recognising in 1982 or so that I would need to go back to real academic work, I was in the first group to enrol in Britain's first (part-time) Masters' degree in Policy Analysis set up by Professor Lewis Gunn at the University of Strathclyde whose staff included people such as Michael Keating, Arthur Midwinter and Gavin Kennedy.

Lewis Gunn delivered traditional lectures about the fascinating exchanges which had been taking place in the postwar period in the USA about rationality and the decision-making process

involving people such as Herbert Simon and Charles Lindblom…..

The session on "Frame Analysis" (originating from Erving Goffman in 1974) made such a vivid impression on me that I still have memories of my reaction as it was being delivered. The technique simply demonstrates how different "stories" are used to make sense of complex social events. But I had no occasion to use it - little did I realize that it was to become a central part of post-modernism's encouragement of diverse realities… It took more than a decade before political scientist Chris Hood's The Art of the State (1998) brought it all home to me. The book uses Mary Douglas' grid-group theory to offer a brilliant analysis of 4 basic "world views" (individualist, hierarchical, fatalist and egalitarian) and their strengths and weaknesses in particular contexts.

Michael Thompson is an anthropologist who has used Mary Douglas' cultural theory to make The case for clumsiness (2004) which, again, sets out the various stories which sustain the different positions people take on various key policy issues – such as the ecological disaster with which we are now confronted. There is a good interview with the author here

Three short reports give an excellent summary of all this literature; and its political significance – Keith Grint's Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions (2008); Common Cause (2010); and Finding Frames (2010)

But geographer Michael Hulme's Why We Disagree About Climate Change (2009) is probably the most thorough and satisfying use of the approach - applying seven different lenses (or perspectives) to make sense of climate change: viz those of "science, economics, religion, psychology, media, development, and governance". His argument is basically that –

- We understand science and scientific knowledge in different ways
- We value things differently
- We believe different things about ourselves, the universe and our place in the universe
- We fear different things
- We receive multiple and conflicting messages about climate change – and interpret them differently
- We understand "development" differently
- We seek to govern in different ways (eg top-down "green governmentality"; market environmentalism; or "civic environmentalism")

It's a pity that so few authors have tried to apply this approach to the global economic crisis. Most people who write about that are stuck in their own particular "quadrant" (to use the language of grid-group writing) and fail to do justice to the range of other ways of seeing the crisis. This diagram of mine tries to offer an example of the sort of humility we need from our writers

The previous post and this one have involved a romp down memory lane. I've inflicted this on my readers **simply because it demonstrates how long it often takes to recognise what's staring us in the face. I**'m sure I remember George Orwell saying something to that effect. It's like boiling a frog – something I've never done – but Charles Handy uses the story to make the point about the danger of being left behind by social change

Turning Points?

There were two headlines at the top of yesterday's Guardian front page – the first the predictable one about the observation of the 20th anniversary of 9/11; the other about the US drone strike on Kabul which had mistakenly targeted an Afghan who turned out to be working for a US organisation and which also blew up several of his children. We are supposed to see the first as a "world-changing" event and the second as "collateral damage". This is US exceptionalism at its most distasteful and hypocritical.

The world did not change on September 11th 2001 – and anyone who thinks so is out of their tiny mind. I can well believe that it shocked the American population to realise that they could be attacked on their own soil – but that just shows the scale of their imagined exceptionalism. And did the US voter understand that (s)he was [unleashing a **8 trillion dollar** military escalation](#)?

But the question of global turning points is an important one….Virginia Woolf;s famous assertion (in 1924) that "[on or about December 1913 human nature changed](#) " rather challenges my view that modernism started when Marx and Engels produced their "Communist Manifesto" in 1848. But her statement is matched by the equally questionable claim that

> *"the modern world died at 3.32 pm 15 July 1972 in St Louis, Missouri when the notorious Pruitt Igou housing scheme was dynamited".*

This is taken from an amusing article "[Postmodernism – 10 key moments](#)" written by the author of "Grand Hotel Abyss – the lives of the Frankfurt School"

My recent posts have focused on such questions as
- when modernity became postmodernity
- whether postmodernity has played itself out
- what will replace it
- whether any of this matters

Let me try to deal with each of these – briefly

1. Daniel Bell's use of the phrase "post-industrial" in 1960 signalled the birth-pangs of post-modernism with 3 important books detailing the relevant social changes before the decade was out – viz in [The Temporary Society](#) by Warren Bennis and Philip Slater (1968); [The Age of Discontinuity](#); by the famous Peter Drucker (1969) and [Between Two Ages - America's Role in the Technetronic Era](#) by Zbigniev Brzezinski (1970) best capturing the transition pains…

2. Postmodernity is like a slow-burning fuse. The whole "fake news" saga is down to it – although I have tried to show in these posts that it has had its positive side eg our appreciation that the world can and should be seen from a variety of perspectives

3. So I think it's a bit [early to celebrate its death](#). We still haven't managed to respond to the savaging it's given to the belief we used to have in human reason – and how untruths

can be exposed. Indeed it's only recently that I, for one, have come across books which, 2 decades ago, made sterling efforts to deal with the challenges this posed to the various academic disciplines. Two of the best are Richard Evan's In Defence of History (1997) and D McCloskey's "The Rhetoric of Economics" (1998)

4. And yes, I do think it's important to try to identify turning points in history. Global warming, Artificial Intelligence and Pandemics are the three factors which, together, seem now to be leading us in a new direction – as these 2 reports indicate "Artificial Intelligence and the future of Humans" (Pew Institute 2018) "Humanity is at a Precipice" (2019) – as well as this recent article

6. MISCELLANEOUS

Title	What you will find
Bookmarks	start with some histories of central and eastern europe
Snippets	
The 50 Economics Classics	A table with a short summary of each book
Angryonomics	A short Mark Blyth
Education under the microscope	robotisation, trust and power
Surgery of the Mind	some of the lessons I learned in the last few years of project work
Snippets	
The Uses of Conflict	a book reminds me of the dangers of consensus
Mary Parker Follett	someone who had a subtler understanding of organisations than Frederick Taylor but has not received the recognitions she deserves
Assessing a government's record	tony bliar's biography
Ivan Illich	his neglected influence on my generation
Helping People Help Themselves	one of the best and neglected devpt books
Dear diary	politicians usually produce boring self-justifications but there are exceptions
Future politics will be very different	AI is the latest Big Issue – this is a rare look at the effect it will have on politics
The age of the unthinkable	One book about complexity does make sense to me
The New Uncertainty	
GroupThink – what always brings power down	the afghan disaster
Evoking Nations and Zeitgeist	thoughts sparked by gift of a painting book
The future isn't what it used to be	an invitation produces a reading list
Futures Work Anyone?	some thoughts sparked off by a zoom meeting
Why the shortages?	The pandemic interrupts smooth global
Whatever happened to Rationality?	JR Saul, Pinker et al
How ideas circulate	Does the business class read?
Chris Hedges and the Triumph of the Spectacle	Celebrating a great US radical What happens when people stop reading books?
Cultivating change	young german's "Unlearn"
Stop the World	reconsidering Harari
Is patriotism the answer?	Climate change and the nation state
The acceptable face of national pride?	Thoughts on Romania's independence day
Military madness	The US military get 50 billion dollars they didn't ask for
The new face of power	Are engineers undemocratic?

Bookmarks

I'm increasingly swamped by books – both physical and virtual – and just wanted to share some of the interesting titles which are on offer around me…..

1. **Histories of the entire region of east central Europe** are not quite as rare you might think – although I have only one in my extensive physical library up in my mountain house. My virtual library can offer [Inventing Eastern Europe – the map of civilization in the mind of the enlightenment](#) by Larry Woolf (1994); and [Companion to central and eastern Europe since 1989](#) by Adrian Webb (2008).

But most historians find it easier to focus on individual countries such as Poland. I have, however, just come across a 1000 page study of the region which looks quite fascinating - entitled [From peoples into nations – a history of Eastern Europe](#); by John Connelly (2020[) reviewed here](#) and with an [interview here](#).

And **[Europe since 1989 – a history](#)** by Philip Ter (2016) looks to be a fascinating insight into the impact of neoliberalism on eastern bloc countries

2. Always a sucker for intellectual history, I liked the look of [The Ideas Industry – how pessimists, partisans and plutocrats are transforming the marketplace of ideas](#); Daniel Drezner (2017). I used to dislike the American habit of long self-explanatory titles but now find it a fairly useful guide around the crap which deluges the conscientious reader.

3. And always wanting to find texts which try to penetrate the souls of nations, I am intrigued with [Bending Adversity; Japan and the art of survival by](#) David Pilling (2014) which I found in my local English bookshop last week. Pilling was the lead journalist for the Financial Times for 8 years from 2001 but returned in March 2011 to cover the Tsunami events.

His take complements superbly the very thorough study published recently by Edinburgh academic Chris Harding "*Japan Story – in search of a nation 1850 to the present*" (2018) which I am half-way through. It's an easy read and particularly strong on social and cultural vignettes….

4. **Donald Sassoon is one of these amazing writers who tries to do justice to an entire subject in one large volume**. The history of European Socialism and European culture are two of the issues he has tackled - and his latest is a 700 page tome (with 170 of the pages being bibliography and notes) - "[Anxious Triumph – the global history of capitalism 1860-1914](#)" (2019); It's reviewed [here](#) and [here](#)

It may be forbidding in size – but it has an engrossing style….It's lying here on the table awaiting my attention

5. [Rethinking governance – the centrality of the state in modern society](#) by S Bell and A Hindmoor (2009) is another book with a title I find appealing…

> *At its simplest, the arguments that governments have been 'hollowed out' or 'decentred' and must now work with a range of non-state actors in order to achieve their goals…… are overblown. In fact, part of the motivation for writing this book was the lack of a sustained alternative account of governance in which the state played a central role in governance arrangements and relationships, but also steered or metagoverned them. Although we point to instances in which governments have been*

marginalised and collectively valued policy goals are being pursued by non-state actors, such cases are few and far between.

In our view governments and the broader set of agencies and public bodies which together constitute the state are and should remain central in governance processes.
But while rejecting what we call 'society-centred' arguments about governance, we also express reservations about alternative 'state-centric' accounts in which governments are imagined to operate in splendid isolation from the societies they govern, descending from on high occasionally to impose their policy preferences.
Instead, we develop a 'state-centric relational' account of governance, arguing that states have enhanced their capacity to govern by strengthening their own institutional and legal capacities but also by developing closer relations with non-state actors

6. Bill Mitchell is a leftist Australian economist whose Reclaiming the State – a progressive vision of sovereignty in a post neo-liberal world (2017) I'm trying to find the time to at least skim. He's also one of the proponents of Modern Monetary Theory I'm trying to get my head around. The US Dissent magazine ran a dissenting article here…

7. Rentier Capitalism – who owns the economy and who pays for it? By Brett Christophers (2020) is an epub book which looks another must-read!

8. **Adam Tooze** is one of these polymaths whose skills I envy and admire – graduating as an economist, he then got a doctorate in economic history from Berlin University and the LSE and became Professor of modern German history at Yale - focusing on its economic aspects and producing impressive books on first economic aspects of the Nazi regime and then the definitive account of the global financial meltdown ("Crashed – how a decade of financial crises changed the world"). He has blogged about different aspects of the book
https://adamtooze.com/2018/06/23/framing-crashed-1-trade-and-finance-two-different-visions-of-the-twenty-first-century-global-condition/

He is a prolific journalist and produces a regular economics newsletter – Chartbook - which is the best briefing on economic issues I know.

Snippets

1. Romanian efficiency and European obfuscation and exploitation
I this week completed the (Pfeizer) vaccination process (in the city of Ploiesti) with **Romania being credited with having vaccinated about 12% of its population – putting its performance very [much in the main body of European countries](#)**.
And I have to say I was pretty impressed **with the efficiency of the organization** I saw in the school gymnasium – with help for those filling out the forms quickly on hand.

As **indeed I had been earlier when I had started the process of getting the new Certificate of Residence** I require as a citizen of a country which is no longer a member of the EU. A Brexit help-desk has been set up in the Ministry of the Interior which deals with such things – and their response to my question about required health insurance was immediate, helpful and correct.
And the two visits I had to make to the Tax and Public Health authorities to acquire the necessary paperwork took only a couple of hours…
Even Romanians despair of their country – **but my experience suggests that all is not lost!**
Ask me, however, about the paperwork I get from **my (Austrian) bank; (Italian) electrical or (French) water companies** – and that is a very different matter. I simply can't understand the complicated information they send me….
The bottom line, however, is that they all charge too much….

2. One Party Government
This May will see the Scottish Nationalist Government celebrate its 10th year of control of the system of devolved government in my country. [Here's a very useful – if dated - French take](#) on the situation which doesn't quite catch the recent sense that – despite the much-praised leadership of Nicola Sturgeon during the pandemic – the government had been somewhat [inert in fields such as education](#).

One criticism which has been raised in recent years about the apparently social-democratic Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) is of its tight discipline – any challenge to its authority is quickly dealt with. In a small country. This can and does profoundly affect reputations and careers.
[The UK Civil Servant](#) is a very useful and thoroughly independent website - so [this critical assessment is all the more significant](#) –

> *The SNP came to power in Scotland having had no previous experience of government and with few core policies other than Scottish Independence. It had a charismatic and controversial leader in Alex Salmond but wasn't supported by any heavyweight think tanks, nor by experienced Special Advisers. The new government accordingly leant heavily upon Scottish Government civil servants. The latter work within the rules and customs of the wider UK Civil Service, and in particular are supposed to avoid any sign of political allegiance.*
> *In practice, partly as a result of ministerial pressure, and partly because it was the only way to ensure smooth and effective administration, senior officials became close to SNP ministers and were more obviously supportive of SNP policies than their London colleagues ([or the Public Administration Select](#)*

Committee) *thought wise. More recently, Scottish Permanent Secretary Leslie Evans has of course been* *accused* *of lack of impartiality in the handling of the investigation into Alex Salmond.*

The parallels with the Boris Johnson government in Westminster are all too clear. The Johnson Cabinet is weak and inexperienced, having been chosen exclusively from the ranks of Brexiteers. It has a charismatic but controversial leader and no obvious core policies other than to get Brexit done. Its promise to "fix the crisis in social care once and for all – with a clear plan we have prepared" was a lie. It didn't have any idea how it intended to take advantage of post-Brexit freedoms, nor did it have an "oven-ready Brexit deal".
Its closest supporters may not be drawn from post-UKIP 'fruitcakes' but they are certainly not drawn from mainstream industrialists, scientists and economists – or even heavyweight think tanks. Its most prominent Special Advisers, in the form of Dominic Cummings and his close colleagues, clearly had no clue how to get things done in government.

But weakness has to be concealed under shows of apparent strength – with bullying and cronyism as a result. Lord Acton put it most succinctly – "All power corrupts – and absolute power absolutely…"
And it all culminated in recent weeks with committee scrutiny of the two leading figures in the Nationalist drama (Salmond and Sturgeon) - reduced in recent years to squabbling figures as Salmond has faced, and successfully fought off, accusations of sexual harassment – and then brought forward his own counter-accusations against the Scottish government and party figures of wrongful behaviour. The Scottish public may have had rich spectacles as a result – but it has hardly been an edifying or useful experience – as this rather gossipy LRB article makes clear -

The committee appointed by the Scottish Parliament to inquire into the Scottish government's mishandling of its investigation into the first two allegations against Salmond (both made by civil servants) has been sitting regularly since August 2020.
It rapidly descended into a partisan free-for-all, with opposition members less interested in the HR error which led the investigation to be ruled unlawful (after a judicial review brought by Salmond) than in trying to find the killer question that would somehow lead to Sturgeon's resignation. They took evidence in the morning and took to social media in the afternoon.

No one has come out of it well: not the committee members, or the obfuscating civil servants, or Salmond, who refused to apologise for his 'inappropriate' behaviour, or Sturgeon who, though full of regret, could not shed light on all her government's mistakes……….

The SNP's problems are not all linked to the Salmond allegations. After nearly fourteen years in power, the party is exhausted. But, with or without Sturgeon at the helm, there is no effective opposition (the Tories' Scottish leader isn't even in the Scottish Parliament, and Scottish Labour's leader, Anas Sarwar, its sixth in the last decade, has only just been elected). The polls were predicting that on 6 May the SNP would regain the majority it won in 2011 (despite a PR system that was supposed to prevent absolute majorities) and lost in 2016, but now a hung parliament is being forecast (and a drop to 49 per cent support for independence). I find it hard to imagine that the spirit of 2014 will ever be rekindled.

3. The new-style Clown politician
Beppe Grillo has a lot to answer for….Since his arrival in Italian politics more than a decade ago, comedians have become serious political figures – although it was, arguably, Ronald Reagan who

made politics a world of "make-believe". It's therefore entirely appropriate that it's a dramatist who brings us this one of the best analyses of Boris Johnson

> *Observe classic Johnson closely as he arrives at an event. See how his entire being and bearing is bent towards satire, subversion, mockery. The hair is his clown's disguise. Just as the makeup and the red nose bestow upon the circus clown a form of anonymity and thus freedom to overturn conventions, so Johnson's candy-floss mop announces his licence.*
> *His clothes are often baggy – ill-fitting; a reminder of the clothes of the clown. He walks towards us quizzically, as if to mock the affected "power walking" of other leaders.*
>
> *Absurdity seems to be wrestling with solemnity in every expression and limb. Notice how he sometimes feigns to lose his way as if to suggest the ridiculousness of the event, the ridiculousness of his presence there, the ridiculousness of any human being going in any direction at all.*
> *His weight, meanwhile, invites us to consider that the trouble with the world (if only we'd admit it) is that it's really all about appetite and greed. (His convoluted affairs and uncountable children whisper the same about sex.) Before he says a word, he has transmitted his core message – that the human conventions of styling hair, fitting clothes and curbing desires are all … ludicrous. And we are encouraged – laughingly – to agree. And, of course, we do.*
>
> *Because, in a sense, they are ludicrous. He goes further, though – pushing the clown's confetti-stuffed envelope: isn't pretending you don't want to eat great trolleys of cake and squire an endless carousel of medieval barmaids … dishonest? Oh, come on, it's so tiresome trying to be slim, groomed or monogamous – when what you really want is more cake and more sex. Right? I know it. You know it. We all know it. Why lie? Forget the subject under discussion – Europe, social care, Ireland – am I not telling it like it is, deep down?*
> *Am I not the most honest politician you've ever come across? Herein the clown's perverse appeal to reason.*

4. Ignore these ridiculous "Culture Wars"
I simply can't take seriously the latest cultural emanation from the US – "cancel culture" which is apparently producing waves not only in the UK but in France – where Macron has warned that no statues will be torn down – and Germany. See also Culture wars – the media and the british left; Curran, Gaber and Petley (2018) and https://whiterosemagazine.com/liberalism-vs-leftism/

50 Economics Classics
Although one of my favourite genres is intellectual history, books about the history of economic ideas or of political philosophy tend to be somewhat boring – it's as if the requirement to be comprehensive robs the author of his/her passion. I'm thinking of Roger Backhouse's Penguin "History of Economics" (2002) But – as I noted a year or so ago – the last decade has seen significant improvements

> *The academic community has always taken a dim view of popularisation – the eminent economist JK Galbraith who wrote "The Affluent Society" in 1958 suffered very much from academic jealousy as did the historian AJP Taylor in the same period – so it is great that some writers and journalists have turned increasingly to the world of science and ideas. Grand Pursuit; the story of economic genius (2011) is a good example. Written by Sylvia Nasar, a Professor of journalism (who also produced "A Beautiful Mind" about game theorist John Nash), it attracted a rather sniffy review from one of the doyens of Economics - Robert Solow..*
> *Not, however, that I want to discourage academics from writing well and for the general public! I was delighted to*

discover recently a "popular" book by academic philosopher James Miller [Examined Lives – from Socrates to Nietzsche](#) with a [nice interview here](#). Alan Ryan is another academic who writes well although his [On Politics](#) is just a bit too voluminous a history of political thought for me. [These extensive notes give a useful sense](#) of what would be in store for any brave reader

And a foray into my favourite Bucharest (remaindered English) bookshop duly unearthed ["50 Economics Classics – your shortcut to the most important ideas about capitalism, finance and the global economy"](#) by Tom Butler-Bowden (2017) - one of a series I had never heard of but which promises to top the amended list of my next "Most Accessible Reads on Economics".

His approach is to select and summarise (in a few pages) 50 books whose focus span the key issues tackled by economics - over a 200-year period. Included are both old and new "classics" – Pikety and Graeber as well as Marx and Hayek.

Most such books go for the **chronological approach** – with the result that readers tend to flick the opening pages and pick up interest only toward the book's middle. Perhaps it's the influence of post-modernism, but *it's pure genius that this author goes instead for what might be called* the "**fatalistic" approach** and **selects his books instead alphabetically**

As a result, for example, Milton Friedmann rubs shoulders with JK Galbraith; Naomi Klein with Keynes; Adam Smith with Hernando de Soto etc

And, naturally, there are as many historians and journalists in the list as pure economists…..he even lists for each entry the books with which it can be compared…..

I've developed one of my famous tables as a tribute – with my final column amending in some cases what some might fault as the author's over-generous attitude to the market…

I'll start with the first dozen……

Book/Author	Year	Issue	Argument
"Lords of Finance" L Ahamed	2009	The gold standard and the 1920s	Fixed ideas in economics can have disastrous results
"The microtheory of innovation" WJBaumol	2010	Entrepreneurship	We neglect those to take risks at our peril
"Human Capital" Garry Becker	1964	Unfortunately the book spawned the dreadful notion of human resources	The most important investment we make is in ourselves
"The Second Machine Age"	2014	Probably the most famous of the techno-optimist books about IT	"Techno revolutions have to allow for the advance of everyone"
"23 things they don't tell you about capitalism" Ha-Joon Chang	2011	An early mass book questioning economic orthodoxy	Many nations advanced by breaking the rules of orthodox economics
"The Firm, the market and the Law" Ronald Coase	1988	One of the most famous articles in the history of the subject	Why firms exist – the role of transaction costs
"GDP; a brief but affectionate history" Diane Coyle	2014	This index of economic success (like economics) rests on some very questionable assumptions	How we measure inputs and outputs has significant effects on people and nations
"Innovation and	1985	It's as important as the	

		traditional factors of land, labour and capital	
Entrepreneurship" Peter Drucker			
"The Ascent of Money" Niall Ferguson	2008	A british historian who likes to provoke and scandalize – but writes well	Finance has been the crucial ladder in the making of the modern world
"Capitalism and Freedom" Milton Friedman	1962	Funded by "The Reader's Digest" and dodgy billionaires to pull the wool over our eyes	A hymn to the free market
"The Great Crash" JK Galbraith	1955	One of the classic analyses of the Great Depression	It's apparently government's job to stop speculative frenzies
"Progress and Poverty" Henry George	1879	His ideas still live	When land – rather than people and production – is taxed, prosperity increases

"50 Economics Classics" – part II

I'm impressed with this book - one of a very useful series by Tom Butler-Bowden which actually invite you in and keep you reading. Suffering as we do these days from a surfeit of choice (what the Germans poetically call "Die Qual der Wahl").

Many people will be dismissive of such a "Reader's Digest" approach – but when time is short and we are deluged with books – this is a quite brilliant idea. Of course we can all quibble with his selection (I passed on the books on investing) - but the book covers a 200 year period and includes figures whose work challenges what I detect in the summaries as an overly pro-market enthusiasm – such as Hirschman, Klein, Marx, Ostrom, Schumacher and Veblen.

I've made my own comments in the penultimate column.

Book/author	date	Comment on selection	Argument offered by Butler-Bowdon
"The Rise and Fall of American Growth" Robert Gordon	2016	Bit too American – the idea of limits to growth has been developed by so many people	The greatest gains in living standards have already been made
"The Use of Knowledge" Hayek	1945	A short essay which gives the basic principles of Hayek's challenge to the notion of planning	Societies prosper when they allow decentralisation of knowledge
"Exit, Voice and Loyalty" AO Hirschman	1970	A highly original thinker – whose work deserves to be rediscovered	Consumers have many options to get what they want
"The Economy of Cities" Jane Jacobs	1968	Challenged the trend toward scale and emphasised citizen choice	Cities have always been the main drivers of wealth
"The General Theory of Employment" JM Keynes	1936	Still a bible for my generation	Governments must actively manage the economy
"The Shock Doctrine" Naomi Klein	2007	Passed me by	Neoliberal doctrines have been a disaster for many developing countries
"Freakonomics" Steven Levitt	2005	An early book to challenge the religion of economics	Economics is not a moral science – more a study of how incentives work
"The Big Short" Michael Lewis	2010	Passed me by	Modern finance was meant to minimise risk – but has actually increased it
"Bourgeois Equality"	2016	Not read	The world became rich thanks to an idea – entrepreneurship

Deirdre McCloskey			
"An Essay on the Principle of Population" Thomas Malthus	1798	His shadow still looms over us	The world's finite resources can't cope with an increasing population
"Principles of Economics" Alfred Marshall	1890	One of the last clearly-written economics books	To understand people, watch their earning. Saving and investing
"Capital" Karl Marx	1867	A work which suffers from 150 years of exegesis	The interests of labour and capital always conflict
"Stabilising an Unstable Economy" Hyman Minsky	1986	A prophet honoured largely after his death	Capitalism is inherently unstable
"Human Action" Ludwig von Mises	1949	Surprised to find him included	Economics has laws which no person, society or government can escape
"Dead Aid"	2010	people like Bauer were much greater critics – but the author is a black woman	Countries grow rich be creating industries not by addiction to aid
"Governing the Commons" Elinor Ostrom	1990	Got the author a deserved Nobel prize	To stay healthy, common resources like air, water and forests need to be managed in novel ways
"Capital in the 21st Century" Thomas Pikety	2014	The book everyone has claimed to read – and noone has!	If inequality widens, there will be social upheaval
"The Great Transformation" Karl Polanyi	1944	An unreadable classic	Markets must serve society, not the other way around
"The Competitive Advantage of Nations" Michael Porter	1990	A very bad idea	Industry clusters and competition make nations rich
"Capitalism – the unknown Ideal" Ayn Rand	1966	I preferred "The Fountainhead"	Capitalism is the most moral form of political economy
"Principles of Political Economy and Taxation" David Ricardo	1817	Only read a summary	A free-trading world will see each nation fulfil its potential
"The Globalization Paradox" Dani Rodrik	2011	One of the most original economists	Globalisation, national self-determination and democracy – only 2 are possible
"Economics" Paul Samuelson	1948	The text book of my economics course in 1960	The best-performing economies combine classical and Keynesian approaches
"Small is Beautiful" EF Schumacher	1973	A brilliant mind ahead of his time	A new economics is needed which takes more account of people than outputs
"Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy" Joseph Schumpeter	1942	A powerful book which justified the notion of democracy consisting of "the circulation of the elite"	The dynamics of capitalism and its "creative destruction" is superior to other systems
"Micromotives and Macrobehaviour" Thomas Schelling	1978	Schelling was part of the war-games military complex	Individual choices produce "tipping points" – with major effects
"Poverty and Famines" Amartya Sen	1981	An important thinker but not a good writer	People starve not because there isn't enough food but because economic circumstances change (!!)
"The Ultimate Resource" Julian Simon	1996	Economics at its most arrogant	The world will never run out of resources – because ingenuity not labour, capital or materials
"The Wealth of Nations"	1776	The moral philosopher whose basic message has been twisted	"the wealth of a nation is its people – not

Smith		out of recognition	its government" (!!)
"The Mystery of Capital" Hernando de Soto	2000	A favourite of right-wingers	Property rights are the basis of prosperity
"The Euro" Joseph Stiglitz	2016	Highly readable	The ideological underpinnings of a failed currency
"Misbehaving – the making of behavioural economics" Richard Taler	2015	The more presentable face of economics	How psychology has transformed economics (??)
"The theory of the leisure class" Thorstein Veblen	1899	Odd to find in the selection	The great goal of capitalist life is not to work
"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism" Max Weber	1890	Very influential book!	Culture and religion are the overlooked ingredients of economic success.

Angrynomics – a model for future books

Mark Blyth is a political economist I greatly respect – his interdisciplinary range is rivalled only by sociologists such as Wolfgang Streeck and economic historian Adam Tooze. And the new little book Angrynomics he has co-authored with Eric Lonergan is a model not only of clarity and presentation but of how to help readers find their way through the torrent of reading with which we are deluged. I suggested recently that – given the apparent reduction in our attention span - publishers should be offering shorter texts. Angrynomics is a superb exemplar……reviewed nicely here -

A fascinating new book, Angrynomics, by Eric Lonergan and Mark Blyth, analyses what has been happening, and gives a highly plausible explanation. They set up three versions of capitalism, beginning around 1870.

- *Capitalism 1.0 was the liberal laissez-faire version that had its heyday before 1914. Under this system, governments did not manage the economy; they assumed that the markets would do it for them. But the first world war destroyed the international cooperation that made the system work and required heavy government intervention to produce the armaments that armies needed. And then the Great Depression showed that markets do not automatically correct. And it produced its own "angrynomics" in the form of fascism.*

- *Capitalism 2.0 emerged after the second world war. Economic policy was designed to avoid the excesses of the 1930s by keeping unemployment as low as possible, with the help of fiscal policy. To keep this system stable, banks were highly regulated and capital flows were tightly controlled. This model was highly successful until the early 1970s; growth was high, living standards of the poorest rose sharply and inequality fell. The period was known as the wirtschaftwunder in West Germany. But it broke down, the authors say, because low unemployment empowered trade unions and led to a wage-price spiral. The system also enraged the owners of capital who suffered high taxes and low returns, and were unable to move their money. They started to finance conservative politicians and thinktanks who argued for a change in approach.*

- *This led to Capitalism 3.0, what some call the neoliberal model. This was marked by the reduction of high tax rates, "flexible" labour markets and the decline of trade unions, along with the rise of privatisation, globalisation and free capital movements. For a while, this system was heralded as the "great moderation" because it produced a long boom with low inflation. But Capitalism 3.0*

was also marked by an uncontrolled banking sector, which eventually brought ruin in 2007 and 2008.

One of the delightful things about the book is its (rare) use of a Socratic-type conversation between the two authors (the other being a hedge-fund adviser!). I am surprised that this device is not used more – the only previous example I can think of is the fascinating "Life – and how to survive it" (1996) by therapist Robin Skynner and comedian John Cleese.

Voters had gone along with Capitalism 3.0 while it seemed to deliver growth but for them, "flexible labour markets" meant less job security, while globalisation meant a squeeze on their real wages. When the banking sector caused a crash, the bankers were bailed out but poorer voters suffered from austerity in the form of lower social benefits and squeezed public services.
Inflation may have fallen but real wages were not rising. And unemployment may have been low but many jobs were poorly-paid and had fewer rights. At the heart of all this, in the authors' view, is that capitalism has tended to treat labour as a "commodity", along with land and capital. But "labour is the only commodity capable of generating a social reaction to its movement in price". When workers banded together in trade unions, and worked closely together in factories, they could use their negotiating power. Nowadays, with workers more dispersed, their frustration is expressed in the political sphere.

But anger can be a dangerous thing. As Messrs Lonergan and Blyth argue, anger can find vent in "tribal rage", like the hostility of rival football fans; it is often expressed as hostility towards some outside group such as foreigners, or religious or ethnic minorities. The alternative is "moral outrage" which protests against legitimate wrongs, such as the exploitation of the system by rent-seeking plutocrats. To quote the book: "The challenge for politics today is to listen carefully to, and redress, the legitimate anger of moral outrage while exposing and not inciting the violent anger of tribes".

As someone who has written a couple of books of economic history (Paper Promises and More), I would like to add another layer to the argument. The Capitalism 3.0 model was driven by monetary policy, which focused on low inflation, a target pursued by independent central banks. But globalisation by itself was driving inflation lower (as the former communist bloc joined the market-based economy) and technology cut the costs of manufactured goods. This created a feedback system whereby central banks cut interest rates in response to lower inflation, delivering capital gains to those who owned financial assets and those who had borrowed money to buy real assets like property. Higher debts made the system unstable, and when that stability resulted in a financial crisis, central banks propped up the system with lower rates and more liquidity.

The lesson learned by many traders and bankers was that taking risks paid off in the long run. Each crisis led to lower rates and more debt until 2009, when the only way that the system could be made to work was for central banks to buy bonds outright, cut interest rates below zero, and all the rest. This system is very fragile. The US has just enjoyed its longest boom in history. But the Federal Reserve was only able to raise interest rates in baby steps, and had to bring them back down to near zero at the first sign of trouble.
*Far from debt "not mattering", it matters a lot. **But the mistake is to focus just on government debt when it is the total of consumer debt, corporate debt, financial system debt that matters**. This debt is very high and needs to be refinanced on a regular basis; the only way it can be sustained is with very low rates. This explains the puzzle in the first paragraph; why governments can borrow at low rates despite needing to issue so much debt.*
In political terms, this matters because the system has undermined the interest of the middle

164

classes as well as the working classes. In the 1920s, German hyperinflation wiped out the savings of the middle classes creating a well of support for Hitler. The corollary this time is the effect of low rates on pension pots; middle class people could once retire on a generous final salary pension. But such pensions have gone and their replacements (defined contribution pensions) are dependent on bond yields to generate income. These have plunged meaning that many middle-class people have pension pots that won't pay a decent income; they must work longer or live in reduced circumstances.

Anyway, enough of defining the problem: **how to deal with it?** The authors' solutions are intriguing, but (in my view) skate over some of the practical issues.

- One proposal is to take advantage of negative real interest rates. The government could issue bonds and use the proceeds to buy global assets, such as equities, setting up a National Wealth Fund. The expected return on those assets will be much higher than the yield on the bonds, and the profits from the National Wealth Fund could be distributed to citizens every 15–20 years. The obvious danger is that global equities have a prolonged slump, akin to that suffered by Japan where the stock market is still below its end-1989 level. The authors argue such an extended slump is unlikely at the global level. That may turn out to be right, but a more fundamental problem is that 15–20 years is a very long time to wait; it will not help people now. Angry voters, and the politicians they elect, can do a lot of damage in the interim. Another issue is that the authors propose distributing the proceeds to the "80% of households with the fewest assets". Sounds fine, but we don't have a register of assets by households, and the practical difficulties might be immense: the make-up of households (flat-sharing twenty-somethings, for example) can change quickly. Does a household with eight people get the same as a single person?

- The other ideas include a tax (in the form of a royalty or licence) on tech companies to reflect the use they make of our data, with the proceeds paid out to all those who allow access to the data. Since most of these companies are American, it is not clear how Washington would react to this proposal (tech tax plans from France raised the ire of President Trump). Let us say it raised £20bn a year; with more than 50m adults in the UK, that would be £400 each. You would need to raise an implausible sum for this to generate a large income each.

- The third idea is to borrow money (again at low rates) to invest in green projects such as wind power. Again, this seems entirely sensible; this is a good moment to invest in infrastructure. Whether it will assuage voter anger is another matter.

To be fair, this is a short book and the authors write that "our aim has been to introduce these ideas, not to seek to prove them or make the case that nothing else matters". More focus could, I think, have been placed on land and inheritance taxes: the latter were very effective at destroying the fortunes of the aristocrats who lorded it over British society before 1914.

But as I hope this essay has demonstrated, this is an excellent, thought-provoking book that should be read by anyone with an interest in economics or politics. Angrynomics is a new term to me but one that should be at the heart of political debate.

More on Mark Blyth

https://lawschoolpolicyreview.com/2020/11/08/healing-our-angry-world-with-angrynomics-in-conversation-with-prof-mark-blyth/

https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/09/book-review-angrynomics-lonergan-and-blyth.htm

https://spe.org.uk/reading-room/book-reviews/angrynomics/

The Secret Life of Institutions: On the Role of Ideas in Evolving Economic Systems, Entretien avec Mark Blyth

https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2016/01/in-praise-ofpolitical-economy.html

Education under the microscope

Every month, the Great Transition Initiative invites its readers to explore a specific question relating to climate change and how we might best respond - with the author of Journey to Earthland selecting the question and managing the discussion.
Last month the theme selected was "educating for the future we want".

I'm normally very hesitant about engaging in discussions of this topic – in which everyone professes to be an expert and in which strong prejudices are quickly on display - but I felt it was about time I pulled my disparate thoughts on the subject together, starting with a confession and personal profile.
I personally enjoyed my (state) schooling and respected my teachers (and fellow-students) - although I had no clear idea about my course of study at university and chose modern languages by default, moving in the last two years to politics and economics.
In the mid 1960s, graduates had the pick of the job market. So I had 4 different jobs in so many years - before getting my dream job as a Polytechnic Lecturer able to indulge myself for about 15 years before students complained that I was failing to give them what they required. A few years later I started a career as a consultant to government bodies in ex-communist countries - and latterly learned a lot about training…..

It's not so long ago that kids were told that, if they did well at school, they would be rewarded with a great job – which we often kept at for our entire life. Charles Handy remembers how puzzled he was at the emphasis given to pensions when he got his first job at British Petroleum in the 1950s.
Handy was the first to raise questions about "the future of work" and went on to lead what he, later in the 1980s, designated a "portfolio" career – with jobs increasingly on short-term contracts. Education remained important in such a system – but with a greater emphasis on the post-school and university sectors.

With the increasing reality of robotisation, what advice should parents now give their children? Basically, it seems, the same message as the deschoolers of the 1960s…..rediscovering the need for creativity? The speaker in the video is education expert Sir Ken Robinson whose 3 books include "Creative Schools – the grassroots revolution that's transforming our schools" (2015).
And, of course, the new fear - which the pandemic has intensified - is that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will further accelerate future losses. A World without Work – technology, automation and how we should respond by Donald Susskind (2019) may make grim reading – particularly when taken in conjunction with The Future of the Professions which the author penned a few years earlier with his father – but it offers a sound and balanced analysis of what awaits.
One of the interesting points it makes is that AI has developed with the speed it has not by machine intelligence aping human intelligence – but by big data crunching…..Our minds, it seems, remain intact….

And it is the working of our minds that has become the focus of a newfound interest from

psychologists (and "cognitive scientists" as they rather grandly call themselves)
I had, in the 1970s, been a fan of Ivan Illich; social critic (Paul Goodman); Education Professor (Neil Postman) and adult educator and philosopher (Paulo Freire) – although working away behind the headlines loomed the more profound figure of psychologist Carl Rogers. And in 1983 fellow psychologist Howard Gardner published the book Frames of Mind – the theory of multiple intelligences whose effects are still being felt today. Five Minds for the future (2006) is a clearer statement

The public has become increasingly vexed as international league tables have demonstrated national weaknesses in educational systems which are now seen as crucial for a country's economic success…..Whose advice should we heed on such things?
- Politicians – who have the authority to make changes?
- Teachers – who have the responsibility for managing the system of schooling?
- Experts – who study and monitor the workings and the performance of the system?
- Parents – who have variable degrees of responsibility, activity and expectation?
- Pupils – who have their own expectations and attitudes?

When we ask such a question, the variability of the answers is quite amazing. Each country tends to have its own pattern – with the Finnish system regularly quoted as the most successful but outlier country in which highly-trained professionals are trusted to get on with the business.
Most people would probably still respond to the question with a reference to the need for collaboration - few would trust the politicians.
And yet it's politicians who set the pace in many countries! It's hardly surprising that neoliberal Britain sets the most store by competition and choice for schools and parents – with "academies" being the preferred educational tool for New Labour in the period of its rule from 1997-2010. Europe is (and remains) more consensual in its approach – with the French elitist system being the exception which is only now being challenged.

My references are always too anglo-saxon – so I was delighted to find a Dane (Knud Illeris) as the most respected European educationalist and look forward to reading his How we Learn – learning and non-learning at school and beyond (2007) as well as Contemporary Theories of Learning – learning theorists in their own words ed Knud Illeris (2018). And to reading more thoroughly this issue of a European educational journal

I'm intrigued by how little reference there is to "power" in discussion about schools, education and training and hope to turn to that next

"Surgery of the Mind"

When communism suddenly imploded in 1989, noone really knew what to do. Earnest tomes had explored how capitalism would tear itself apart and morph into communism but few had bothered to consider – let alone prepare for - the opposite path. Transition to the institutions of democratic capitalism was the only option. And that meant shock therapy – and the building of a new institutional capacity in which training was a major component.

I got a bit uneasy with the mechanistic way I saw training being delivered and started to question the various assumptions which were being made about the key roles in the process. Was this, I wondered, just the way things worked in ex-communist countries – or was the problem perhaps deeper??
Training is something that always seems to be done to someone else. The verb indeed seems to be parsed "I know: you learn: they are to be trained"!
I had a wiser older political colleague who, whenever he heard the word "training", would react by retorting "surgery of the mind".

On the basis of 2 decades working in central Europe and Central Asia on programmes of capacity development I tried in 2011 to identify the key lessons I had learned about training starting with these questions –

- WHO needs to learn WHAT?
- WHY (motivation)?
- HOW do people (in public service) learn most effectively?
- from/with WHOM?
- HOW are trainees - and trainers - evaluated?
- WHO decides these various things - and HOW?

I noticed that the authority of two groups set the pace
(a) **training suppliers** (in which academia was initially dominant) and
(b**) the senior managers who commissioned** training.

It was these two groups who decided
- **what skills and knowledge were to be developed**
- **in whom**
- **who was to provide such courses**
- **how and where this was done.**

As the senior managers usually delegated these issues to the more junior Training or Personnel Manager, most of these questions were decided by the academics who ran the courses - who were generally subject specialists with no training themselves in training methods.
And in the early years, the focus of training was seen as the more junior staff; the topics technical (eg finance); the location a classroom; and the method a lecture.
The "recipients" of the training had little influence on such things: and the effectiveness and credibility of training suffered as a result.

Several decades down the line we seem to have "learned", at considerable cost, two big lessons about organisational training strategies
- good and highly appreciated courses can give managers new enthusiasm, perspectives, skills which, however, are wasted when they return to an organisation which does not allow the newly acquired skills and attitudes to be applied since it lacks the will or ability to change.
- some organisations aware both of the need to change, and of the role of training in that process, find that the courses they have sent managers to have been structured in a traditional scholastic way which, however unconsciously, teaches conformity and respect for authority - rather than the inter-personal and strategic skills involved in managing effective change.

Effective learning requires
- the "learner" to feel that (s)he is in control of the process
- to be integrated in and supported by the working environment
- an initial process of helping him/her develop a set of individual learning "targets"
- training suppliers to respond to these.
- in a highly participative way

Formal, scholastically-based training is of limited value unless linked to - and supported by - the working environment. There is little point in someone going on (say) a one-month course unless the individual's immediate manager strongly supports this whether as part of project development or management development - and to the extent of new responsibilities being given on return. **More and more organisations in the West are realising that the sort of change they need to make can only be done by the whole organisation engaging in joint learning - led from the top.**

Snippets

1.   Policy Analysis
Paul Cairney is one of these rare academics who writes well. He has had a policy analysis blog for 12 years which is simply the most comprehensive on the subject there is He makes the topic as interesting as it actually ought to be.
His latest post refers to an article he's just written about Covid 19 and health policy-making.
I was impressed that, after the obligatory "abstract", the article was preceded by a "Plain Language Summary" which I understand is a feature of at least this Open Research Europe site.
And I also liked that he had teamed up with health and political science academics in at least one foreign university apart from his own, Stirling University.

I should at this stage confess that I was a graduate from one of the first (part-time) **Policy Analysis** courses run in Britain in the mid 1980s by Lewis Gunn of Strathclyde University – with the emphasis on the rationalistic side of things being challenged by the likes of Charles Lindblom. And I still vividly remember the first time "frame analysis" was presented to us.
But this did not prevent me from presenting an overly rationalistic "stage-approach" when, in 2002, I drafted a Manual for senior Slovak Civil Servants…. If only I had known that, by then, Deborah Stone's Policy Paradox – the art of political decision-making was into at least its second

edition! It remains for me the best read on the subject…

2. Eric Hobsbawm – a Life

Eric Hobsbawm was a brilliant British historian who lived to a grand old age and left us definitive and superbly-written [histories of our age which you can access on this post of mine](). There's a nice [1995 profile of him here]().

LRB commissioned an hour-long [documentary on him which you can view here]()

3. Britain - and its Union

Peter Oborne may be a right-wing British journalist but he is certainly not typical in his readiness to attack the myths of so many of his ilk – particularly the country's highly elitist system of power. I have been a great fan of his [Triumph of the Political Class]() since it came out almost a decade ago.

When therefore he sticks it not only to Boris Johnson and Donald Trump but to the enture media class, you can rest assured you're in for a great read. And so it is with his [Assault on Truth – Johnson, trump and the emergence of a new moral barbarism]() (2021) which is in epub format.

It's on Johnson's watch that the collapse of the so-called UK is becoming final - as this paper from the neutral Constitution Society demonstrates - [Britain at the Crossroads - can the British State handle the challenges of devolution?]()

https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/are-strong-parties-the-answer/
https://shapiro.macmillan.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/review%20.pdf
https://www.niskanencenter.org/can-america-become-a-multiparty-system/

The Uses of Conflict

I may sometimes fancy myself as a contrarian, challenging the "conventional wisdom" but, temperamentally, I am not cut out for confrontation. The blog occasionally refers to my growing up in a bit of a class-less "No Man's Land" in which I became painfully aware of the power of conflicting group loyalties; and keen to search for ways beyond polarised simplicities…

And these are very polarised times – with people apparently unable to resist the temptation to strike out at others.

We know that people argue very differently in different cultures – the [French]() (and Romanians) are classic "disputationists", with a perhaps apocryphal guide being issued to British soldiers before the Normandy landing warning them that loud verbal disputes amongst natives should not be mistaken for conflict – it was just normal French conversation.

Japanese and other Asian cultures have much more subtle ways of conducting disputes which a delightful new book [Conflicted – how productive disagreements produce better outcomes]() tells me demonstrates the distinction between Low Context (direct and explicit) and High Context (indirect and implicit) cultures. Although the English like to think of themselves as open and direct, the way they use [language in negotiations and everyday conversation has sufficient aspects of High Context]() to confuse their interlocuteurs about the real meaning of their words.

I learned a lot from the book – **which is useful not only for couples, families and teams but for more specialised work in reconciliation, hostage-taking and even addiction**.
I generally dislike the psychology books which detail experiments to persuade us of their thesis but, somehow, Ian Leslie's use of this device works. He weaves theory nicely into the text and then brings it all together at the end to leave us with 10 Golden Rules.

But before then, I had been bowled over by how he had dealt with what he argued had been a great decline in our **argumentative style since Socrates invented his method of probing for clarity and truth**. Disputation, he argues, has been institutionalised in medieval universities but people like Descartes ridiculed such scholastic disputes – after which Guttenberg and the Reformation made the pursuit of knowledge **an individual rather than social matter**.

> *"For intellectuals, the purpose of reason was to gain knowledge of the world – but reason often seemed used to entrench whatever we wanted to believe, regardless of whether it was true. For the "interactionist" reason hasn't evolved to reach truth but to facilitate communications and cooperation"*

> **"The myth of the individual who can think his way through any problem in magnificent isolation is powerful….but misleading"**

The book then goes into the more specialised field of conflict or dispute reconciliation and summarises what are, of course, complex issues in some interesting (if necessarily simplistic) injunctions which I have taken the liberty of "translating"

Injunction	Translation
First connect	Look for opportunities to make a personal connection with the "other" in an argument, try to establish "trust"
Let go of the rope	Don't try to control what the other person thinks or feels
Give face	Don't engage in status battles. Make the other feel good about themselves
Check your WEIRD- ness	Ie **Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic"** Probably the most important. Don't assume you share cultures!
Get curious	Show genuine interest in the other
Make wrong strong	Use mistakes to apologise
Disrupt the script	Introduce novelty and surprise into the conversation
Share constraints	??
Only get mad on purpose	
Be real	

And indeed one of the books I came across at university was Lewis Coser's The Functions of Conflict published in 1956

Mary Parker Follett

I was intrigued by a couple of pages Ian Leslie's book on the value of "productive conflict" which extolled a management thinker active a hundred years ago whose arguments have a powerful resonance and made me wonder how we have managed to forget the wisdom of Mary Parker Follett.

> *"The best disagreements, she showed the author, neither reinforce nor eradicate a difference but make something new out of it. Persuasion is a noble and necessary art and I like it when I make someone think again. But my ultimate aim is not to get you to agree with me – I want your thinking to improve my thinking; your experience to modulate and enrich my own. I want us to disagree creatively to make something new and better out of our diverse opinions that is better than either of us could have conceived of alone. That way we both win"*

I had, of course, heard of Follett but Leslie's tribute has had me exploring her writing. Interestingly, the very first essay in volume III of her Collected Papers (Dynamic Administration") is one on "Constructive Conflict". There is even a Mary Parker Follett Network which contains her original work – as well as commentaries on its continued relevance. One of the latter papers has a partial explanation of why she has for so long remained hidden from view

> *It has been hard for management studies to place Follett, historically. She was never quite forgotten, but, at the same time, the scope of her work was never fully appreciated. She was a social scientist, a practical philosopher, a lecturer- author-teacher with a surprisingly wide-ranging body of work. She was a woman.*
> *She neither focused on corporations, nor on factory production, like her peers, at the height of the industrial age. Instead, she was a long-standing manager-entrepreneur in the not-for-profit sector. She was neither an academic (because academia would not allow her to be one) nor a consultant.*
>
> *The philosophical and linguistic quality of Follett's writing and speaking has made her work age less than that of probably any other business writer. It seems as though Follett speaks to us today very much within our own language, even after 100 years or so. This characteristic also has likely contributed to the problem of 'placing' her, historically*

The paper then goes on to make a fascinating point -

> **Management science does not, as it is usually depicted, begin with Taylor and Fayol,** *continuing through the Human Relations movement, in the meanwhile coalescing into the classical school, and eventually diversifying into different post-classic branches. Instead, the **history of management is, and has been the story of two distinct, opposing schools of thought that emerged side-by-side, at the dawn of the 20th century.***
> *The conceptual foundations of these two parallel threads of management science were laid by two iconic, but very distinct trailblazers: Mary Follett (1868-1933), on one side, and Frederick Taylor (1856-1915) on the other. These two separate varieties of organizational philosophy have co-existed alongside each other, within management science ever since. Around the beginning of the 20th century, engineer Taylor pioneered his approach of industrial production. In 1909 this approach would be named Scientific Management. **It would later evolve into command-and-control, or the dominant brand of management, which we will also call Alpha here.***
> *Simultaneously, another, very different pioneer, a social science researcher and practitioner, Follett*

*was fleshing out a decentralized-democratic, or **Beta approach to organizing that was informed by political studies, psychology, philosophy and sociology.** While Taylorism, resonated strongly in industries and corporations, early-on, and immediately gained avid followers and enemies, Follettian thinking took root somewhat more silently*

Follett's early experience was in [neighbourhood (or community) work](#) – which gave her powerful insights into democratic thinking and indeed an early little book was actually called "[The New State](#)" (1918)

Further Reading
"[False Prophets – the gurus who created modern management and why their ideas are bad for business today](#)" by James Hoopes (2003) has a positive chapter on Follett. Peter Drucker was also a great fan......
[The Age of Heretics – a history of the radical thinkers who reinvent corporate management](#); Art Kleiner (2008) is one of several books which tries to restore her place – with a powerful introduction from one of the best modern management writers, Warren Bennis.

Assessing a government's record
Is a balanced judgement of a government ever possible?
I've just finished a book about New Labour under Tony Blair. He was PM for 10 years – from 1997 to 2007, leaving office just before the global financial crisis broke – and this particular book, "[Broken Vows – Tony Blair, the tragedy of power](#)", published almost a decade later, **purports to be an assessment of his government's record** - at least in the fields of health, education, immigration, energy and "the wars".

Tom Bower is a [well-known British investigative journalist](#) who has profiled commercial rogues such as Robert Maxwell, Tiny Rowlands, Conrad Black, Bernie Ecclestone (of F1 fame) and Richard Desmond let alone characters such as Klaus Barbie but offers more sympathetic profiles of Prince Charles, Simon Cowell and Boris Johnson.
His bibliography lists the books he relied on – basically 40 memoirists and **not a single one of the many writers whose serious analytical accounts of the period were available** *if only Bower had had the patience to read serious material.*
It's significant, for example, that no mention is made – whether in the bibliography or the text – of a book which had **attempted an assessment both fair and accessible** - [The Verdict – did Labour Change Britain?](#) by Polly Toynbee and David Walker issued several years earlier in 2010.

And that is **certainly the question by which it is reasonable to hold both Blair and New Labour to accoun**t. "*Modernisation" was Blair's mantra* – conservatism the enemy whether it rested in the trade unions or the civil service – both of whom he regarded as the immediate enemy.
Indeed such was the suspicion of the civil service from the very beginning that virtually all New Labour Ministers threw their senior civil servants' advice notes into the bin. They had their manifesto – strongly enforced by both Blair and Brown, the "Iron Chancellor".
Not only Civil Servants but the Cabinet was treated with utter contempt – if it had not been for the Blair-Brown tension which would often break out in open conflict, the resultant system might

have lapsed into total "groupthink"…..

Sadly, however, Bower doesn't bother to use (or even make reference to) the excellent analysis available in British Government in Crisis (2005) by Christopher Foster who had been both an adviser and consultant but prefers instead to rest on a critique of the vainglorious Michael Barber of "deliverology" infamy

Strangely, only in Education had New Labour come with coherent plans for the future. Bower's story is one of the system staggering from one crisis to another – with no lessons learned other than the need to return to Conservative policies which Blair not so secretly had always favoured.

These days, we associate New Labour with four main things – PR "spin", the Iraq war; a globalist encouragement of immigration; and huge budgetary increases for health and education. But there was a positive side which even an ex-adviser to Margaret Thatcher recognises in this critical review of "Broken Vows".

But – despite the claims in the Introduction - Bower's book is NOT an attempt to judge a government – let alone dispassionately. As is abundantly clear in the devastating picture of Blair portrayed in the book's opening chapter and Afterword, this is a hatchet job on a man **whose greed, superficiality and delusions were already evident to most of us**

Those wanting a serious analysis of New Labour should better spend their time on –
New Labour – a critique Mark Bevir (2005) Not the easiest of reads – the author is a post-modernist academic if also a social democrat – but starts from the position that New Labour used slippery language and ignored its traditions
The Verdict – did Labour Change Britain? Polly Toynbee and David Walker (2010) written by journalists sympathetic to Labour who supply a reasonably balanced assessment – if one rather light on references.
https://www.newstatesman.com/health/2011/05/nhs-warner-case-change

Rubbish Amazon

I'm delighted to report that Amazon have locked me out of my account. I used Amazon these past few years only when I'm in my summer house in the mountains – otherwise the combination of bookshops here in Bucharest and the internet Zlibrary more than satisfy my needs. Indeed I have an embarrassment of unread books – particularly virtual ones in pdf format (more than 500).

Amazon have recently started a security coding system which depends exclusively on smart phones – which I refuse to adopt. So I can no longer use my password to check in to my account. I tried this evening to alert them to this – but had first to go through a **security check which I failed since I was unable to give them**

- my precise postal code;
- 3 titles of recent purchases (which were last summer – I could remember only one);
- or the number of my current credit card (which is out of date and I have destroyed as the bank advised)

I was feeling guilty about continuing to use Amazon (even spasmodically) – they have done such huge damage to
-        the book trade

-     independent bookshops
-     national budgets

So I am relieved that they have been so stupid as to lock out someone who had been a good customer of theirs for more than 20 years – needing books which were simply not available in countries such as Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Romania.
The only drawback is that I will in future be unable to send books to my daughters…..

Adulation and Narcissism in Leaders

It is too easy these days to fault politicians. They have become the go-to scapegoat. And we should **always be suspicious when a scapegoat is offered as the explanation for society's ills**….In Germany, in the 1930s, it was the Jews; post-war America chose the "Commies"; Trump and the Brexiteers immigrants.

The account Tom Bower gave in his book about Blair's record in government – Broken Vows – Tony Blair, the tragedy of power (2016) which I reviewed in the last post but one was, quite bluntly, a bit of a travesty. But it did indicate some of Blair's personal weaknesses – in particular indecisiveness, cowardice and downright fear of his Finance Minister, Gordon Brown, to whom he deferred on all budgetary matters (if not also of his spin-man Alastair Campbell).
And few of us needed reminding of Blair's **greed, superficiality and delusions** (of grandeur) which became very obvious once he left power in 2007.

Blair is not the first political leader to register psychological issues – and certainly not the last. His immediate successor, Gordon Brown, was a bit of a bully (with all the implied weaknesses) but had the compensatory gifts of high intelligence and political nous. The walking disaster that is Boris Johnson has no such excuses.
Trump's narcissism has made us all more aware of the neglect of political psychology as an explanatory factor in leadership. In the 1970s I remember a wonderful book written by a reforming Labour MP Private Member Leo Abse (1973) which applied Freudian analysis to the issue of the social liberalisation process of the Wilson Labour governments.
But we needed The Psychology of Politicians ed by Ashley Weinberg (2012) to get the full picture.
As a rather reserved strategic politician in Europe's largest regional authority (in Scotland) I had in the late 1970s been briefly tempted to go to Parliament – with a strong chance of victory – but had decided against simply because I saw the damage it did to your psyche. I knew a few MPs quite well – and they all had this harassed look in their eyes

Ivan Illich's neglected influence on my generation

How did a priest manage to captivate me (and others) for the best part of a decade in the 1970s? I was, after all, a politician – if a reforming one – with increasing responsible positions as, first, a Chairman of a (newly-established) municipal social work committee and then as Secretary of the ruling group of Scotland's (and Europe's) largest Region and its strategist for its central policy relating to multiple deprivation – or social justice as it would be called these days. What, you might well ask, was I doing with a **dangerous anarchist who challenged the claims of health and educational professionals?**

I had, admittedly, been open to community action since first encountering the likes of Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire as I fought the local housing bureaucracy with local residents in the late 1960s – as you can see in the long 1977 article Community Development – its political and administrative challenge. Alinsky was more of a tactical street-fighter; Freire the deep and inspirational thinker about self-help. But it was Illich who supplied the hard weaponry

The seeds were probably sown a decade earlier – at university – when I was exposed to Karl Popper's The Open Society and its Enemies (1945) and its demolition of those who claimed universal truths. The article given by the link is a critical reassessment of the 2 volume work after 50 years but can't detract from the powerful impact it had on this reader in the early 1960s. Even at school, I had learned to be a "freethinker" and to be suspicious of what JK Galbraith called "the conventional wisdom".

Illich's critique in the 1970s of the monstrous arrogance of health and educational professionals in claiming to know best was, therefore, pushing at an open door for the likes of us….*In all the talk of the dominant narrative of Neoliberalism, this element in my generation's formation tends to be forgotten.*

Social Democracy was undermined to a large extent because my generation stopped believing in the big battalions – not least because of the power of such writers as Illich. In so doing, we committed the first but unnoticed unilateral disarmament! It was the Trade Unions and the working class who had given democracy its teeth. But – as individualists and members of identity tribes - we came to scorn organisational power and have allowed Big Money to subvert democracy with its lobbying, Think Tanks and Corporate Media.

I am not, of course, doing Illich justice when I paint his contribution as one largely of criticism. There was also a deep caring and compassion for the ordinary person – and their capabilities. But, somehow, we western readers tended to take that for granted – such was the power of his dismantling of the claims of the powerful.

Some Reading on Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich
The Prophet of Cuernavaca – Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West by Todd Hartch (2015) is a recent testimony to the man.
The Challenges of Ivan Illich – a collective reflection; by L Hainacki (2002)
We Make the Road by Walking – conversations on education and social change; Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) Myles Horton was a great American practitioner of working class education who teamed up with Freire for this book
Tools for Conviviality; is a short book by Ivan Illich (1975) which gives a sense of his style.

Dear Diary

You wonder why publishers would ever publish anything written by politicians – most recent political memoirs and biographies certainly land up being remaindered. Few politicians seem able to resist the temptation of narcissistic whingeing or settling old scores.

But a few of the British contingent stand out for the quality of their writing and the insights they bring to their assessment of an historical period.

- **Dennis Healey** held several senior Ministerial positions and gave us a memoir which covered the pre- and post-war years with a rare sensitivity [Time of my Life](#) (1989).
- Prime Minister **Harold Macmillan** – living in the times before the 24/7 news cycle - was, remarkably, able to find the time to [keep a regular diary](#) (as well as [to read extensively](#)).
- [Tony Benn](#) was, however, the diarist par excellence – producing [no fewer than eleven volumes](#) covering a 50 year career in politics – and developing, in the process, from a mainstream politician to a hate-figure for the mainstream media to a "[national treasure](#)" in his retirement.
- Chris Mullin was another, less high-profile Labour figure, whose diaries impress largely because – unlike most politicians – he was thoroughly aware of his unimportance.
- But Conservative Alan Clark was probably the wittiest of the diarists….

Ruth Winstone was the editor if the Benn diaries and has done us all a great service with the excerpts she selects in [Events, dear Boy, Events – a political diary of Britain from Woolf to Campbell](#) (2012)

The depths the genre has now reached are evident in the latest set of diaries to be inflicted on us viz [In the Thick of It](#) by Alan Duncan (who??) – as narcissistic and nasty bit of writing as I have come across for some time. The life of such people seems to consist of "power lunches" with "high-powered" people and adds to my conviction that if such empty-headed people are occupying the positions of power, **we desperately need some of the [discipline of the Chinese regime which insists that its politicians are properly trained and then thoroughly assessed and monitored](#)** as they progress through the ranks.

But the ex-Leader of the UK Liberal party Vincent Cable has shown that some politicians are still able to think and write coherently – with his recent book [Money and Power – the world leaders who changed economics](#) 2021 epub

Further Reading

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/08/five-best-political-diaries-observer-supplement
https://fivebooks.com/best-books/chris-mullin-on-political-diaries/
https://shepherd.com/best-books/political-diaries-united-kingdom
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/feb/28/gossip-sex-and-social-climbing-the-uncensored-chips-channon-diaries
https://www.realclearhistory.com/articles/2016/04/04/churchills_history_of_english-speaking_peoples_232.html

Politics will be very different in the AI Age

Political parties may now be using algorithms and selectively targeting citizens with their messages – but, fundamentally, lack the courage to offer the public the sort of programme which would actually make a difference for voters. Such a programme would consist of such things as

- - Breaking up monopolies
- - Ensuring that the rich (and multinationals) pay escalating rates of taxation
- - Returning privatized public utilities to the public – preferably to municipalities or "mutuals"
- - Reinstating the requirement of media balance
- - Restricting corporate funding of parties
- - Citizen juries
- - A neutral civil service

The UK Labour Party was exceptional in its 2019 and 2017 election manifestos offering this sort of programme – and see where it got them I hear a lot of you saying…..
There is apparently a project which compares the election manifestos of some 1000 political parties in 60 countries. Unfortunately it's one of these highly academic websites with impenetrable prose. It did, however, put me on to what looks a useful collection of recent articles Why the Left Loses – the decline of the centre-left in comparative perspective Rob Manwaring and Paul Kennedy (2018) which I should add to the reading list on social democracy I recommended some 4 years ago

I'm currently in the middle of Future Politics – living together in a world transformed by Tech by James Susskind (2018) which must be one of the first popular books to explore the likely impact of the new world of algorithms and artificial intelligence.

> The premise of 'Future Politics' is that relentless advances in science and technology are set to transform the way we live together with consequences that are both profound and frightening. We are not yet ready for the world we are creating. Politics will not be the same as it was in the past. For Susskind, three changes are of particular note: increasingly capable systems that are equal or superior to how humans function; increasingly integrated technologies that are embedded in the physical and built environment (the internet of things); and an increasingly quantified society, whereby details of our lives are captured as data and processed by digital systems. Those who control the technologies will exercise power over us, set the limits of our liberty, and determine the future of democracy. One of the problems is that the engineers devising and implementing these technologies rarely engage with consequences of these developments.
> So, it is up to the rest of us to correct this deficiency and take responsibility for understanding and analysing the implications of this transformed world. We must, says Susskind, engage with political theory if we are to think critically and develop appropriate intellectual tools to tackle these digital developments.
>
> With this as the agenda, Susskind sets out to examine this future under the headings of power, liberty, democracy, justice and politics itself, devoting sections of the book to each of these subjects in turn.

In Part Two, Susskind devises three categories for discussing future power: force, scrutiny and perception-control (p. 89). The big tech companies, and government agencies who work with them, will be in control of developments and thus possess the power, while the rest of us will be relatively powerless. Susskind writes:

> *"[T]he shift from law enforced by people to law enforced by technology means that power will increasingly lie in force rather than coercion, with self-enforcing laws that cannot be broken because they are encoded into the world around us." (p. 105)*

This is a really important insight. The following chapter on scrutiny is also perceptive and helpful as Susskind brings more distinctions into play: this time between scrutiny as intimate, imperishable, predictable and rateable (p. 127). The cumulative impact of this scrutiny will construct a world unlike anything we have experienced hitherto. Where we go; what we do; what we purchase; what we write, read and say; let alone who and what we know, and our work and ambitions will all be the subject of scrutiny (p. 129).

Further Reading
How to Run a City like Amazon and other Fables; ed M Graham… J Shaw (2019)
The People v Tech – how the internet is killing democracy (and how we save it); Jamie Bartlett (2018)
https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/blog-review-future-politics/
http://bostonreview.net/politics/clara-hendrickson-jamie-susskind-future-politics-review
https://www.e-ir.info/2019/02/21/review-future-politics-living-together-in-a-world-transformed-by-tech/
Democratic Reason – politics, collective intelligence and the rule of the many; H Landemore (2013) looks a fascinating book from a citizen of the country which produced Rousseau.

The Age of the Unthinkable
On or about summer 1977, the world suddenly started to become a much more complicated place when Ilya Prigogine won the Nobel prize in Chemistry for his work on "dissipative structures" which led to the field for which he is better known – self-organising systems.
His Order out of Chaos - man's new dialogue with nature wasn't published in the USA until 1984 although it had been released in french the same year he had won the Nobel prize.
A few years later Chaos – making a new science (1987) was the first book to popularise the remarkable changes which were beginning to undermine the way we thought we had understood the world and science since Isaac Newton's time.
Einstein's theory of relativity had, of course, been a bit of a challenge a hundred years ago – but somehow we had ridden that out.
But the findings of what was variously called systems, complexity or chaos theory have, for the last couple of decades, been challenging everything we thought we knew about cause and effect!

This blog has several times tried to understand what the new yalk of chaos and complexity actually means – one of my first efforts appearing exactly ten years ago but so far I'm none the wiser – this post containing the reading list I was using last December in a continuing effort to make sense of what the basic message and its implications actually were.
A highly readable book, however, has persuaded me to give the subject yet another chance. It is The Age of the Unthinkable – why the new global order constantly surprises us and what to do about it by J Cooper Ramo which actually appeared in 2009 - 12 years ago - but, curiously for

such a great read, doesn't appear to have made much impression. But he knows how to tell good stories – which soon gripped me sufficiently for me to be willing to put my prejudice aside that he was actually a Director of a Henry Kissinger institute.

One story he uses is the famous one told by [Isaiah Berlin about foxes and hedgehogs](#) – with the latter knowing a lot about one subject and the former a little about a lot of subjects.
He also makes good use of Richard Nesbitt's work on the very different ways Asians and Westerners apparently think – with the former seeing more the context and background and the latter individuals.
Indeed, apart from the story of a Danish scientist I hadn't heard of ([Per Bak](#) who worked on what causes an individual grain of sand suddenly to cause collapse of an entire heap) Ramo doesn't refer all that much to the extensive literature on systems and complexity theory.
Perhaps indeed, that's why I enjoyed the book so much! He chooses instead to focus on the ability of a few creative people to think outside the box. Indeed his book has parallels with [Range – Why Generalists triumph in a specialised world](#) by David Epstein and [Rebel ideas – the power of diverse thinking](#) by Matthew Syed
Let's see what another of the (rare) reviewers of Ramo's book had to say about it -

> *The US-led 'war on terror' has succeeded only in creating more terrorists…..*
> *Largely self-regulating global capital markets have proven to be incapable of balancing or regulating effectively enough to stave off economic misery to millions.*
> *Capitalism itself, and its Cold War foe, communism, have in most cases achieved the very opposite of their aims of bringing prosperity, health and happiness to all.*
> *Ramos does not suggest that the world is anarchic, however. His view is that the world is in a state of 'organised instability', a concept drawn from the physical sciences, in particular chaos theory and complexity science.*
> *In this system, we never know what event, object or person may prove to be responsible for triggering unexpected and occasionally catastrophic change.*
>
> *Our current institutions are inherently incapable of grasping the idea of 'organised instability' and therefore formulate policy via outmoded thought and practice. Essentially, they make bad policy because they do not understand the environment in which they operate, and are too lethargic and inflexible to adapt and respond.*
> *Ramo is encouraging policy-makers to take a good hard look at the world around them and at themselves and then begin reconfiguring power structures and decision-making processes in order to generate good and appropriate policy that reflects the dynamism of a complex world. Through a series of diverse case studies Ramo draws conclusions about how some people and organisations are thriving in an unstable world.*
>
> *At the heart of them all is a reliance on quick-wittedness, innovation, pragmatism, and an eye for opportunity. This holds true as much for Hizballah as it does for Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. The bulk of the book is taken up with describing how people are adaptingsuccessfully across the world while traditional structures are falling behind.*
> *Ramo writes in engaging fashion, is adept at linking across times and subjects, and the reader is left in little doubt that he is definitely on to something.*
> *His suggestion that we view threats as systems, rather than objects, is wise but already part of military planning, if not political decision-making.*

In the next post, I want to go back to Ilya Prigigone's 1984 book – not least because it has an extensive introduction written by no less a figure than Alvin Toffler

The New Uncertainty

I wondered in the last post why [The Age of the Unthinkable – why the new global order constantly surprises us and what to do about it](#) had – despite its readability – made so little impact when it came out in 2009. I suspect it was perhaps just a bit ahead of its time – if only by a year or so. At the time, most of us were trying to get our heads around the global financial crisis and hadn't yet realised that this would be the first of a wave of crises to buffet us in the West. John Urry's "[What is the Future](#)" was published in 2016 and, in 3 pages, gives the titles of no fewer than 60 books which, between 2003 and 2015, spelled out the dystopian future which beckoned… starting with "Our Final Century" (Rees 2003) and finishing with "The Sixth Extinction" (Kolbert)

The buzzwords of our new world are those from systems, chaos and complexity theory - interconnectedness, networks, feedbacks, emergence, nonlinear change, exponential, tipping points….

Arguably we started to become familiar with this language in 1977 when [Ilya Prigogine](#) won the Nobel prize in Chemistry for his work on "dissipative structures" which led to the field for which he is better known – self-organising systems.

His [Order out of Chaos - man's new dialogue with nature](#) wasn't published in the USA until 1984 but it has a powerful introduction written by the famous Alvin Toffler which starts –

> *One of the most highly developed skills in contemporary Western civilization is dissection: the split-up of problems into their smallest possible components. We are good at it. So good, we often forget to put the pieces back together again. This skill is perhaps most finely honed in science. There we not only routinely break problems down into bite-sized chunks and mini-chunks, we then very often isolate each one from its environment by means of a useful trick. We say ceteris paribus-all other things being equal. In this way we can ignore the complex interactions between our problem and the rest of the universe.*
>
> *Ilya Prigogine, who won the Nobel Prize in 1977 for his work on the thermodynamics of nonequilibrium systems , is not satisfied, however, with merely taking things apart. He has spent the better part of a lifetime trying to "put the pieces back together again"-the pieces in this case being biology and physics, necessity and chance, science and humanity.*
>
> *And the **decline of the industrial age forces us to confront the painful limitations of the machine model of reality**. Of course, most of these limitations are not freshly discovered. The notion that the world is a clockwork, the planets timelessly orbiting, all systems operating deterministically in equilibrium, all subject to universal laws that an outside observer could discover-this model has come under withering fire ever since it first arose.*
>
> *In the early nineteenth century, thermodynamics challenged the timelessness implied in the mechanistic image of the universe. If the world was a big machine, the thermos-dynamicists declared, it was running down, its useful energy leaking out. It could not go on forever, and time, therefore, took on a new meaning.*

- *Darwin's followers soon introduced a contradictory thought: The world-machine might be running down, losing energy and organization, but biological systems, at least, were running up, becoming more, not less, organized.*
- *By the early twentieth century, Einstein had come along to put the observer back into the system: The machine looked different-indeed, for all practical purposes it was different depending upon where you stood within it. But it was still a deterministic machine, and God did not throw dice.*
- *Next, the quantum people and the uncertainty folks attacked the model with pickaxes, sledgehammers, and sticks of dynamite.*

Nevertheless, despite all the ifs, ands, and buts, it remains fair to say, as Prigogine and Stengers do, that the machine paradigm is still the "reference point" for physics and the core model of science in general. Indeed, so powerful is its continuing influence that much of social science, and especially economics, remains under its spell.

The importance of this book is not simply that it uses original arguments to challenge the Newtonian model, but also that it shows how the still valid, though much limited, claims of Newtonianism might fit compatibly into a larger scientific image of reality. It argues that the old "universal laws" are not universal at all, but apply only to local regions of reality. And these happen to be the regions to which science has devoted the most effort.

Thus, in broad-stroke terms, Prigogine and Stengers argue that traditional science in the Age of the Machine tended to emphasize stability, order, uniformity, and equilibrium. It concerned itself mostly with closed systems and linear relationships in which small inputs uniformly yield small results. With the transition from an industrial society based on heavy inputs of energy, capital, and labor to a high-technology society in which information and innovation are the critical resources, it is not surprising that new scientific world models should appear.

What makes the Prigoginian paradigm especially interesting is that it shifts attention to those aspects of reality that characterize today's accelerated social change: disorder, instability, diversity, disequilibrium, nonlinear relationships (in which small inputs can trigger massive consequences), and temporality-a heightened sensitivity to the flows of time. *The work of Ilya Prigogine and his colleagues in the socalled " Brussels school" may well represent the next revolution in science as it enters into a new dialogue not merely with nature, but with society itself.*

……. Words like "revolution," "economic crash," "technological upheaval ," and "paradigm shift" all take on new shades of meaning when we begin thinking of them in terms of fluctuations, feedback amplification, dissipative structures, bifurcations, and the rest of the Prigoginian conceptual vocabulary.) It is these panoramic vistas that are opened to us by "Order Out of Chaos".

What contemporary detective television tells us about the UK

I haven't posted for almost 2 weeks – my readership has therefore plummeted from some 300 a day to about 50…..confirming my feeling that blogs are like drugs – people need a fix on them….indeed become dependent…..I'm not sure if I want to encourage such habits – so perhaps I should follow Chris Grey's example and make my posts WEEKLY

Or, when my creativity languishes, put up a link to one of the (many!) good posts which readers may have missed. And I'm conscious that I've not made much use this year of my Snippets feature – which I use to store interesting links which I haven't been able to develop into a single post. In that spirit, let me share an interest I have in **one cultural aspect of contemporary Britain – the television detective genre**.

My mother was a great fan of [Inspector Morse](#) which ran from the late 1980s to 2000 – precisely the period I was out of Britain. I would stay with her for a couple of weeks each year from one of the dozen or so countries in which I was based until her death in 2005; and became quite addicted to it myself.

Starting in 2013, [Endeavour](#) portrayed a younger Morse starting his career in 1965….There was, of course, a strong element of both elitism and class in the series – based in Oxford, with the University buildings and its academics playing a prominent part in the narrative.

It's taken me some time to realise that there is in fact a much better UK detective series – namely [Vera](#), based in Newcastle and the superb surrounding Northumbrian landscapes and coastlines. Its [strength is the realistic portrayal it offers](#) of the **different employment challenges of contemporary Britain** – whether its immigrant workers, fishing communities, construction sites, ex-mining communities or caravan parks and holiday lets….

I'm surprised noone's done a post-doctoral thesis on the series. I wrote a lot last year about what Brexit told us about the UK. Proper study of the Vera series – currently running to 11 – would probably tell us more than most academic studies!

GroupThink – what always brings power down

One of the features of systems of power is what Noam Chomsky has called "Manufacturing Consent" – or the insidious imprinting by national educational systems and media empires of simplistic stories of heroes, villains and other questionable narratives….. Unfortunately, however, for the powerful they end up believing their own propaganda – dissenters who suggest that the world is not as the official organs are portraying it are ridiculed and marginalised.

"[Groupthink](#)" came into our language as a result of a 1972 book - and Paul t'Hart's subsequent "[Groupthink in Government](#)" (1994) helped spawn a veritable industry…

Organisations and governments should therefore all [be alive to the dangers of complacency](#) and some indeed have gone to the lengths of appointing "**devil's advocates" to challenge the status quo**…. "[Rebel Ideas" is a recent good read](#) on this.

But, somehow, all the checks consistently fail – as we have just seen, tragically, in Afghanistan. To many of us, of course, we should never have been there in the first place but the question on everyone's lips these days is how on earth so-called "intelligence" – let alone the "chattering classes" - could have got things so wrong. It is a question that seems to have been recurring rather too frequently these past few years – vide Brexit and Trump

One of the answers is that people have been looking in the wrong places – **if they really wanted answers about Afghanistan, they should have been asking basic questions about money flows and social systems.**

- Take, for example, this report just issued by the independent British Think-tank ODI – [Lessons for Peace](#) which demonstrates that the cash from the poppy trade outstrips disbursements from the Kabul government by a factor of 10 to 1.
- Or this short article from Anatol Lieven that explains the role that [social networks have played in the collapse of any resistance to the Taliban](#)

But Presidents and governments **prefer to listen to the assured voices of the military who promise victory** – and seem to have a built-in resistance to listening to the doubtsayers who bring bad news….. And, since the start of the Vietnam war, there have been any number of voices questioning the conventional wisdom. One of the most prominent has been Paul Rogers (suffering perhaps from his designation as Professor of Peace Studies – although increasingly recognised by security advisers). Even before 9/11 he was making the argument against the belief that military power could defeat guerrilla tactics – as you can see from his collected writing here

Update;
Of all the analysis I've seen since the weekend about the Afghan tragedy, this is the best I've read. It's from a marvellous small weekly E-journal Scottish Review
Another excellent source of information is here
https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/09/how-the-heroin-trade-explains-the-us-uk-failure-in-afghanistan

Evoking Nations and Zeitgeist
One of the most difficult challenges for any writer is to try to evoke the spirit of a nation - in a balanced but insightful way. Chauvinism comes all too easily - be it of the American English, French or even Scots variety.
But summoning up the soul of a country with appropriate text is a much greater challenge – and is probably best done by an outsider who knows the country well…Think Madame de Stael and Germany; de Tocqueville and the USA.

This train of thought is sparked off by my reading – almost in one go – a delightful book called "The Story of Scottish Art" – explored in this nice video. The author is himself a painter and uses a lot of examples (carvings as well as paintings) to illustrate the text - as well as his own water-colours. The book is based on a BBC series.
One of the things which endeared the book to me was the way he skilfully weaved together aspects of the painters' lives with developments in the nation.

Painting is a good "handle" on a country – but it's rarely used. Peter Robb's Midnight in Sicily gives a "food and Mafia" take on that country; and Simon Winder's "Germania" and Neil McGregor's "Germany; memories of a nation" cultural takes on Germany – but both skate over painting.
In 2007, I found myself leading a project in Sofia, Bulgaria and quickly became so taken with the paintings – particularly from the interwar period - I came across in its fascinating small galleries that I started to collect them. Naturally I wanted to know something about the artists – and found myself traipsing into antiquarian bookshops in search of information. The result was initially a small book of 50 pages – and, by 2015 or so, a larger one of 250 pages Bulgarian Realists – getting to know Bulgaria through its Art

This particular book started its life quite literally as a scribbled list on the back of an envelope - of

painters whom a gallery friend thought I should know about in 2008 or thereabouts…..
It eventually became a list of 250 or so Bulgarian artists of the "realist" style which I developed to help me (and visitors) learn more about the richness of the work (and lives) of artists who are now, for the most part, long dead and often forgotten.

But it also got me wondering about who is best placed to try to evoke the spirit of a nation….Social historians? Anthropologists? Artists?

Some of you may know the author Nassim Nicholas Taleb whose book The Black Swan became a best-seller a few years ago. In it he makes a profound point about the process by which artistic "genius" is recognised (or not – the latter being more often the case).
More than four centuries ago, the English essayist Francis Bacon had a very simple intuition….about a man who, upon being shown the pictures of those worshippers who paid their vows then subsequently escaped shipwreck, wondered **where were the pictures of those who happened to drown after their vows**. The lack of effectiveness of their prayers did not seem to be taken into account by the supporters of the handy rewards of religious practice. "And such is the way of all superstition, whether in astrology, dreams, omens, divine judgments, or the like", he wrote in his Novum Organum, written in 1620.

This is a potent insight: the drowned worshippers, being dead, do not advertise their experiences. They are invisible and will be missed by the casual observer who will be led to believe in miracles.
Not just in miracles, as Taleb goes onto argue…..it is also the process which decides whether an artist is remembered. For every artist of genius, there have been many more with the same talent but whose profile, somehow, was submerged….
Art, of course, is the subject of high fashion – reputations ebb and flow…..we are vaguely aware of this…but it is money that speaks in the art "market" and it is the din of the cash register to which the ears of most art critics and dealers are attuned……

As I read Lachlan Goudie's little vignettes of painters in "The Story of Scottish Art", I realised that painters have always occupied an important position in social networks – often poor themselves, they rub shoulders with a wider range of people than most of us. In the early days, of course, they would focus on religious figures and then society people. But from the mid 19[th On] [I]Century, artists such as David Wilkie were able to celebrate ordinary folk in their paintings Nowadays, of course, we rarely see faces any more in paintings – just blobs and abstractions. Perhaps our artists are telling us something?

But my question is, I think, a good one – who is best placed to gives us insights into a country's soul? Poets? Writers? Painters? Anthropologists? Historians? Social historians? Travel writers? Sociologists? Or who?

Further Reading
Watching the English by anthropologist Kate Fox is one of my favourites – for that country.
Theodor Zeldin is probably the best on the French.
Perry Anderson's article A New Germany? offers a great intellectual and political history of contemporary

Germany. But otherwise, it's not easy to find a serious book about modern Germany (although many good - histories) Gordon Craig's magnificent "The Germans" came out in 1982 and John Ardagh's "Germany and the Germans" in 1987 – since then there has be no real update to their insights into the German soul - Gitty Sereny's "The German Trauma – experiences and reflections 1938-2001 and Fritz Stern 's "Five Germanies I have known" (2007) notwithstanding

On Italy, people are spoiled for choice – not just Barzini's classic "The Italians" (1964) but Foot, Gilmour, Ginsborg, Hooper, Jones and Parks all giving a sense of the modern Italians….You pays your money….

The background to social history is laid out in this article

7 social historians lay their claims here

A book on The anthropology of Ireland demonstrates its possibilities

Why the Shortages?

There's a lot of nonsense (understandably) being talked about the shortages being experienced at the moment in the developed world – in the UK, Europe and America alike. Initially, I assumed it was an obvious result of Brexit – with Britain famously relying on Russian and Ukrainian long-distance lorry drivers and treating them like shit. It's only on the continent that decent facilities for truckers are available.

But it seems that things are more complicated – and much more to do with food prices and climate, globalisation and "just-in-time delivery"

By far and away the best article on the crisis is this one on the situation in America

> There's a quiet panic happening in the US economy. Medical labs are running out of supplies, restaurants are having trouble getting food, and automobile, paint, and electronics firms are curtailing production because they can't get semiconductors.
> The problem seems to be getting worse, as the shortages pile on top of each other like a snake eating its tail. For instance, the inability to fix trucks means that truck drivers can't haul boxes of goods, which might actually contain the parts needed to fix the trucks, and so forth.
>
> There are multiple arguments about why the problem is as bad as it is. Everyone agrees that the Covid pandemic and chaotic changes in consumption habits have caused inevitable short-term price hikes and shortages.
> **But what we're experiencing is also the net result of decades of policy choices starting in the 1970s that emphasized consumer sovereignty over citizenship**. The consolidation of power into the hands of private equity financiers and monopolists over the last four decades has left us uniquely unprepared to manage a supply shock. Our hyper-efficient globalized supply chain, once romanticized by men like Tom Friedman in The World Is Flat, is the problem. Like the financial system before the 2008 crash, this kind of economic order hides its fragility. It seems to work quite well, until it doesn't.
>
> The specific policies that led to our supply constrained world are lax antitrust, deregulation of basic infrastructure industries like shipping, railroads, and trucking, disinvestment in domestic production, and trade policy emphasizing finance over manufacturing.
>
> Take biopharmaceutical equipment necessary to make vaccines. There's a shortage of fancy plastic bags that you mix chemicals in to make medicine, which isn't surprising in a pandemic. But the reason for the shortage isn't just Covid but a merger wave; over the last 15 years, four firms

bought up the biopharmaceutical equipment industry, without any antitrust agency taking meaningful action. These firms now have market power, and dominate their competitors, by ensuring their bags can only interoperate with their specific mixing machines. It's like not having enough Keurig coffee machine pods; the shortage isn't the coffee, it's the artificial bottleneck used to lock in customers.

Another example is railroads. Since deregulation in 1980, Wall Street consolidated 33 firms into just seven. And because the Surface Transportation Board lacks authority, Wall Street-owned railroads cut their workforce by 33% over the last six years, degrading our public shipping capacity. The Union Pacific closed a giant Chicago sorting facility in 2019; it now has so much backed up traffic that it suspended traffic from west coast ports.

Ocean shipping is the same. The 1997 Ocean Shipping Reform Act legalized secret rebates and led to a merger wave. The entire industry has now consolidated globally into three giant alliances that occasionally crash their too-big-to-sail ships into the side of the Suez canal.

Then there's trucking. Talk to most businesspeople who make or move things and they will complain about the driver shortage. This too is a story of deregulation. In the 1970s, the end of public rate-setting forced trucking firms to compete against each other to offer lower shipping prices. The way they did this was by lowering pay to their drivers. Trucking on a firm-level became unpredictable and financially fragile, so for drivers schedules became unsustainable, even if the pay during boom times could be high. Today, even though pay is going up, the scheduling is crushing drivers. The result is a shortage of truckers.
There are more problems that strike at the heart of our economy. The most obvious is semiconductors. Production of high-end chips has gone offshore to East Asia because of deliberate policy to disinvest in the hard process of making things. In addition, the firm that now controls the industry, Taiwan Semiconductor, holds a near monopoly position with a substantial technological lead and a track record in the 1990s and early 2000s of dumping chips at below cost.

Fortunately, policymakers have noticed. The Federal Reserve's most recent Beige Book, a report on the economy that is published eight times a year, mentions "shortage" 80 times, and FTC commissioner Rohit Chopra recently pointed out that shortages are slowing the economic recovery. Surface Transportation Board Chair Martin Oberman noted that railroads stripping down their operations to please Wall Street resulted in container congestions at US ports, a significant chokepoint for imports. And Congress is on the verge of funding tens of billions of dollars to boost domestic semiconductor manufacturing.
Even business leaders are getting it. Chemical firms are asking regulators to act. And at last week's Intermodal Association of North America's Intermodal Expo, where representatives from the shipping, rail, ports and drayage industries spoke, one executive said, "Without fear of regulation, I don't know what will motivate all stakeholders to be at the table."

Fundamentally, America – and the world - has to move away from the goal of seeking cheap stuff made abroad for consumers in a low-wage economy. That means rearranging our hierarchies of power so finance, consulting and capital-light tech leaders became less important than people who know how to make things. The problem we have is shortages, so it's time to put people in charge who value production.

In the UK, gas prices are increasing by no less than 70%. And this article certainly suggests that (although there is pressure on global prices) the culprit is privatisation – with few companies

providing reserves and therefore being caught short when demand increases. No fewer than 8 suppliers have gone bankrupt.

There is also the little factor of Covid19 which caused first lockdown and a huge slowdown in production followed by massive "injections" of government cash to both workers and companies. Containers may have kept most global goods flowing - but the uncertainty combined with initial reduction of supplies and then renewed demand has completely upset the balance of demand and supply in many commodities as Boffy's comment emphasises.

When you have a British Prime Minister actually saying that the

> *Queues for petrol and mass culls of pigs at farms because of a lack of abattoir workers are part of a necessary transition for Britain to emerge from a broken economic model based on low wages*

then it's clear I have to walk back a bit my suggestion that the current British crisis is simply part of a wider global phenomenon. Now I see that it's part of a Johnson "cunning plan"!! But it remains too simple to blame it all on Brexit.

update; When you have a British Prime Minister actually saying that the

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update; an interesting German take on the issue
and one of the best explanations - courtesy of Dave Pollard's fantastic monthly roundup
an even better https://ourfiniteworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Gail-Tverberg-Our-Fossil-Fuel-Energy-Predicament-Nov-9.pdf

Am I the only person finding Adam Tooze's regular bulletins somewhat incoherent? Eg
https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-51-explaining-the-energy

The Future isn't what it used to be

When I had a high profile – as a change agent in Europe's largest Region in the 1970s and 1980s – I would quite often receive invitations to join discussion/advisory groups or write articles for journals (generally one led to the other). One of the first came from the Tavistock Institute and was to join the Advisory Group for a 3 year project about **Networks** in which my Region was taking part in the late 1970s.

John Friend was the key player in the Institute of Operational Research which ran the project but Eric Trist and Fred Emery were big names associated with the systems thinking which lay behind the work. The planning theorist [Andreas Faludi nicely situates here John Friend's contribution to the planning field](#)

An article I contributed to the Newsletter they ran gives a very good sense of the wider context in which the work was taking place - "[Local government, learning and social change](#)"
(Linkage newsletter 3 of Institute of Operational Research (IOR) 1978)

What I valued about my involvement with the Institute was the chance to see my work in a different perspective/lens (hence the name the blog has carried for the past year or so).
Wherever we are, we tend to get too used to our routines – and it helps to be jolted out of that and get the chance to see things through the eyes of other people …..
In the 1980s, the invitations came increasingly from Europe and were focused on the processes and lessons of urban change. It was through a network with the acronym R.O.M.E that I met the indefatigable Riccardo Petrella who became a great campaigner against globalisation and for the importance of public water provision

My role as an institutional development consultant from 1991 brought a reduced public profile – although the [European centre for development policy management](#) did invite me for discussions about my local government work in Kyrgyzstan - when I was wrestling with the concept of capacity development about which, with the support of people like Pete Morgan, they did a lot of work. [Here's a typical example](#)

The most recent invitation is from the [International Futures Forum](#) – based in Scotland whose mission statement reads simply

> to enable people and organisations to flourish in powerful times. We address complex, messy, seemingly intractable issues – local, global and all levels in between – fostering practical hope and wise initiative. We support people making a difference in the face of all that stands in the way of making a difference, rising to the challenge of the moment. We develop their 21st century competencies for thriving in complexity and their capacity for inspiring and transformative innovation. We offer resources to support this activity through the [IFF Practice Centre](#). We work with governments, communities, businesses, foundations and individuals.
> We offer people a space for reflection, thoughtful engagement and mutual support and we freely share the powerful ideas, tools and frameworks that result.

I am apparently one of some 50 ex-pats who are being invited in a couple of weeks to take part in a zoom session to explore how we might become more involved. I like the idea and could access some of the material which is available in their [IFF Practice Centre](#).

But I prefer a slightly more independent approach and **have therefore identified some books which I will try to flick through in preparation**…
I start in 1971 with the full edition of one of Futurology's greats – Wendell Bell whose contribution to the field is superbly described in the first half of an article by Barbara Adam, the author of a 2007 study which figures in the list of about a dozen books

Title	Author's background	Comment
The Sociology of the Future – theory, cases and annotated bibliography; Wendell Bell and James Mau (1971),	One of America's foremost futurologists	The book was a real challenge to the prevailing quietism of Talcott Parsons' sociology
Futures we are in Fred Emery (1977)	Renowned Australian organisational thinker – with background in psychology	But rather elitist and technocratic style
New Thinking for a new Millennium – the knowledge base for future studies; Richard Slaughter (1996)	a well-known Australian futurist.	Superbly written
Foundations of Future Studies; Wendell Bell (1997)	See above	The editions of 2004 and 2007 carry great overviews of work since
Future Matters – action, knowledge, ethics; B Adam and C Grove (2007).	British sociologists	a clear and thorough analysis
Blindside – how to anticipate forcing events and wild cards in global politics ed F Fukuyama (2007)	A collection published by the Conservative foundation "The American Interest	Chapters by a range of journalists, historians and geo-political people
Foresight – the art and science of anticipating the future; Dennis Loveridge (2008)	A british analytical chemist with strong working experience in industry who took up an academic post on future studies in 1991	Has the style and insights one would expect from someone with his background
What is the Future? John Urry (2016) only in epub format.	Urry was a great British sociologist	Comprehensive treatment strong on bib references
Superforecasting ; P Tetlock and D Gardner (2016)	Paul Tetlock is an American economics Prof who focuses on finance and statistics	And has a reputation for scepticism about forecasting
Future Studies and Counterfactual Analyses – seeds of the Future; T Gordon and M Todorova (2019)	futurologists – the older an American with a scientific background, the younger a Bulgarian with a cultural studies background	
Critical Terms in Future Studies; ed Paul Heike (2019)	An interesting collection of 50 international academics whose subjects are generally in the humanities	
From What Is to What If – unleashing the power of imagination to create the world we want Rob Hopkins (2019) only in epub format.	Climate change campaigner	This is, admittedly, Rob's latest contribution to his "Transition Towns" series and therefore not quite an example of future studies
Uncharted – how to map the future together ; Margaret Heffernan (2020) epub	Serial entrepreneur American-born but currently living in UK	A curious book – strong on stories – generally sceptical but strong on scenario planning

The pandemic, we are told, is one of these [critical junctures](#) which shake the world from time to time and can move it in surprising directions….

After the global financial crash of 2007 a lot of people's predictions about government roles strengthening were proven false. The power of Big Capital increased – as did inequality. It took the populist revolt to begin to bring western liberalism to its senses.

The Covid pandemic has demonstrated new possibilities for government that people will not forget in a hurry but has equally consolidated the power of the global AI and IT monopolies and intensified our fears of a future without work.

Futurists should therefore be at a premium….

Postscript; interesting that, within days of this post, I was invited by the [Centre for Public Impact](#) to complete a questionnaire about ways of improving government which focused on the sort of information I got from internet platforms.

I had to respond quite strongly that it is only books which help me understand realistic ways for improving government – particularly those written by people such as Gerald Caiden, Chris Hood, B Guy Peters, Eduardo Ongaro and Alasdair Roberts. But the website is an interesting one – and pursuing a very worthwhile objective

Other references

[Encounters in planning thought](#) - collection of autobiographical essays which are great intro to an intellectual field similar to the one I have for the political scientists (Daalder/Rose)

[If then – how the Simulmatics Corporation Invented the Future;](#) Jill Lepore (2020) epub -

The Simulmatics Corporation, launched during the Cold War, mined data, targeted voters, manipulated consumers, destabilized politics, and disordered knowledge--decades before Facebook, Google, and Cambridge Analytica.

Jill Lepore, best-selling author of These Truths, came across the company's papers in MIT's archives and set out to tell this forgotten history, the long-lost backstory to the methods, and the arrogance, of Silicon Valley.Founded in 1959 by some of the nation's leading social scientists--"the best and the brightest, fatally brilliant, Icaruses with wings of feathers and wax, flying to the sun"-Simulmatics proposed to predict and manipulate the future by way of the computer simulation of human behavior. In summers, with their wives and children in tow, the company's scientists met on the beach in Long Island under a geodesic, honeycombed dome, where they built a "People Machine" that aimed to model everything from buying a dishwasher to counterinsurgency to casting a vote. Deploying their "People Machine" from New York, Washington, Cambridge, and even Saigon, Simulmatics' clients included the John F. Kennedy presidential campaign, the New York Times, the Department of Defense, and dozens of major manufacturers: Simulmatics had a hand in everything from political races to the Vietnam War to the Johnson administration's ill-fated attempt to predict race riots. The company's collapse was almost as rapid as its ascent, a collapse that involved failed marriages, a suspicious death, and bankruptcy. Exposed for false claims, and even accused of war crimes, it closed its doors in 1970 and all but vanished. Until Lepore came across the records of its remains.

The scientists of Simulmatics believed they had invented "the A-bomb of the social sciences." They did not predict that it would take decades to detonate, like a long-buried grenade. But, in the early years of the twenty-first century, that bomb did detonate, creating a world in which corporations collect data and model behavior and target messages about the most ordinary of decisions, leaving people all over the world, long before the global pandemic, crushed by feelings of helplessness. This history has a past; If Then is its cautionary tale.

Futures Work anyone?

"How to restore the capacity for effective and responsible action in a world we no longer understand and cannot control"

That's how IFF expressed its mission statement all of 20 years ago when it held its first three-day session – remembered here. Coincidentally, a whole world away in Uzbekistan, I was at that very moment completing a short paper exploring 5 questions –

- why I was pessimistic about the future and so unhappy with the activities of the programmes and organisations I knew of – and with what the French have called La Pensee Unique, the post 1989 "Washington consensus"
- which organisations I admired
- what they were achieving - and what not
- how these gaps could be reduced
- how with my resources I could help that process

That paper was called "Window of opportunity for ordinary people" which morphed after a few years into the 30-odd page "A Draft Guide for the Perplexed" (2013) - incorporating a friend's feedback and further thoughts and notes. Since then the thought-piece has rather got out of hand – with a slimmed-down version being available here

Needless to say, I am no closer to answering particularly the last of the five questions! **I still don't know where to put what time, energy and resources I have left remaining to me**…..

Whereas a body such as the **International Futures Forum (IFF) has used that time to develop very strongl**y – as you will see from their rich website.

There's a lesson in there somewhere..

I was able this morning to take part in a zoom meeting to which IFF had kindly invited me – my first ever such zoom meeting.

I must confess I froze a bit when we were invited to share something about ourselves and our expectations….What we say in such moments is generally so meaningless – a combination of self-promotion, buzzwords and flattery

I naturally mentioned the capacity development work I had been doing since 1990 in about 10 countries - but failed to mention the path-breaking strategic work I had been doing since 1975. Nor did I share just how important my writing is to me – the various efforts, for example, I've made to try to make sense of the reform of the State….or of the breakdown of our current economic system (the "Dispatches" doc in the list of E-books in the top-right corner)

IFF are in the business of helping organisations face up to the challenges of the future – which raises several fundamental questions viz –

- How can this be most honestly done?
- What are the pitfalls to avoid?
- Where has this most clearly been written about?

As you might expect, I can answer the last question most easily. Two books spring immediately to mind – Can we Know Better? Reflections for development by Robert Chambers (2017) one of

the best writers in the development field; and The Collected Papers of Roger Harrison, a rare organisational consultant willing to share his approach.

Organisational consultants don't have a good reputation – too many charlatans have spoiled their pitch as spelled out in at least two highly critical studies "Management Gurus" by Andrzej Huczynszki (1993); and "The Witch Doctors" by Micklewait and Woolridge (1996) which suggest a world of senior executives subject to fads and fashions and given to imposing their will on the work force in an autocratic way. This is even more likely to happen in public bureaucracies which have the additional problem of a political layer on top.

Development writers emerge as the most thoughtful of the bunch – with the OECD publishing a couple of interesting guides to the field a few years ago.
Supporting small steps – a rough guide for developmental professionals (Manning; OECD 2015)
A Governance Practitioner's Notebook – alternative ideas and approaches (Whaites et al OECD 2015)

Whatever happened to Rationality?

I was deeply affected by the "rationalistic turn" in the social sciences which coincided with my University days from 1960-64. My initial field of study had been modern languages simply because I had been good in school at French and German but I was soon seduced by economics and politics and duly switched in my final two Honours years to those subjects

It's only recently that some books have started to appear pointing to **just how much military funding and the Cold War had contributed to the new focus of the social sciences on rationality**. Robert McNamara best embodied the spirit of calculation first in the Ford Company, then in the US Department of Defence – where he introduced the idea of PPBS during the Vietnam war - and finally in the World Bank
But it was to be a decade later before I got properly into the works of people such as Herbert Simon, Etzioni, Lindblom and Wildavsky and indeed I studied them closely only in the 1980s as part of the UK's first MSc course in Policy Analysis with Lewis Gunn in which I enrolled in the early 1980s
And it was 1992 before I came across "Voltaire's Bastards – the dictatorship of Reason in the Western World" which I barely understood but loved - and was to be an early warning shot across the bows of the technocrats in what has, since the onslaught of populism in the past 5 years, become a continuous salvo.

So it's about time we sought some clarity - and perhaps balance – in this fraught debate about rationality and The Enlightenment. Particularly because the latest knight to present himself in the lists - in all his shining armour – is none other than Steven Pinker, the Panglossian Optimist and author of Enlightenment Now who has a new book called "Rationality – what it is, why it seems scarce, why it matters" with the embedded discussion thread being fairly useful.
I sense, however, that getting through the bibliography below is going to be a long haul – so let me just flag the key reading up and we'll see how it goes

Background Reading

Crisis of expertise CEU 2021 syllabus A fascinating outline of a recent course run by the Central European University

The Dialectic of Enlightenment; by Horkheimer and Adorno (1947) It was these German emigrees of the 1930s who brought to America the critique of the enlightenment which arguably sparked the recent right-wing backlash. Ironic that they did so at a time when scientism was taking off with a vengeance!

The Origins of American Social Science Dorothy Ross 1990

Focusing on the disciplines of economics, sociology, political science, and history, this book examines how American social science came to model itself on natural science and liberal politics. Professor Ross argues that American social science receives its distinctive stamp from the ideology of American exceptionalism, the idea that America occupies an exceptional place in history, based on her republican government and wide economic opportunity. Under the influence of this national self-conception, Americans believed that their history was set on a millennial course, exempted from historical change and from the mass poverty and class conflict of Europe. Before the Civil War, this vision of American exceptionalism drew social scientists into the national effort to stay the hand of time. Not until after the Civil War did industrialization force Americans to confront the idea and reality of historical change. The social science disciplines had their origin in that crisis and their development is a story of efforts to evade and tame historical transformation in the interest of exceptionalist ideals. This is the first book to look broadly at American social science in its historical context and to demonstrate the central importance of the national ideology of American exceptionalism to the development of the social sciences and to American social thought generally.

Reclaiming the Enlightenment – toward a politics of radical engagement by Stephen Eric Bronner (2004)
The start of the left's comeback

Cold war social sciences – knowledge production, liberal democracy and human nature ed M Solovey and H Cravens (2014)

https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2013/06/10/book-review-cold-war-social-science-knowledge-production-liberal-democracy-and-human-nature/

https://www.academia.edu/7398929/Cold_War_Social_Science_Specter_Reality_or_Useful_Concept

The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis; Aaron Wildavsky originally 1979 but special edition with foreword by B Guy Peters (2018)

Nervous States – Democracy and the decline of Reason; William Davies (2019)

when Michael Gove announced before the Brexit vote that the British public had had enough of experts, he was thought to have introduced something new and shocking into our politics. As his interviewer Faisal Islam responded incredulously at the time, Gove sounded like an "Oxbridge Trump". Davies's book wants to give us a sense of perspective on this feeling of outrage. We shouldn't really be so shocked, because what Gove said is at some basic level true: the claim to expertise is deeply alienating to many people. And for that reason it is nothing new – the battle between the experts and their critics has been going on for centuries.

How ideas circulate

It was only yesterday that I noticed that the annotated bibliography on the global economic meltdown which has been included in my draft book doesn't mention the management books aimed at business leaders – such as Stephen Covey, Charles Handy and Peter Senge.

At one level that seemed sensible since, with the exclusion of Handy book mentioned in the last post, the titles of these books don't include words such as "crisis" or "capitalism" – preferring phrases such as "The Fifth Discipline", "Gods of Management" or "The Seven Habits of Really Effective People".

But, at another level, the books addressed to business leaders deal with the dynamics of social, economic and technological change – and how those in charge of organisations might best respond to/take advantage of these challenges.
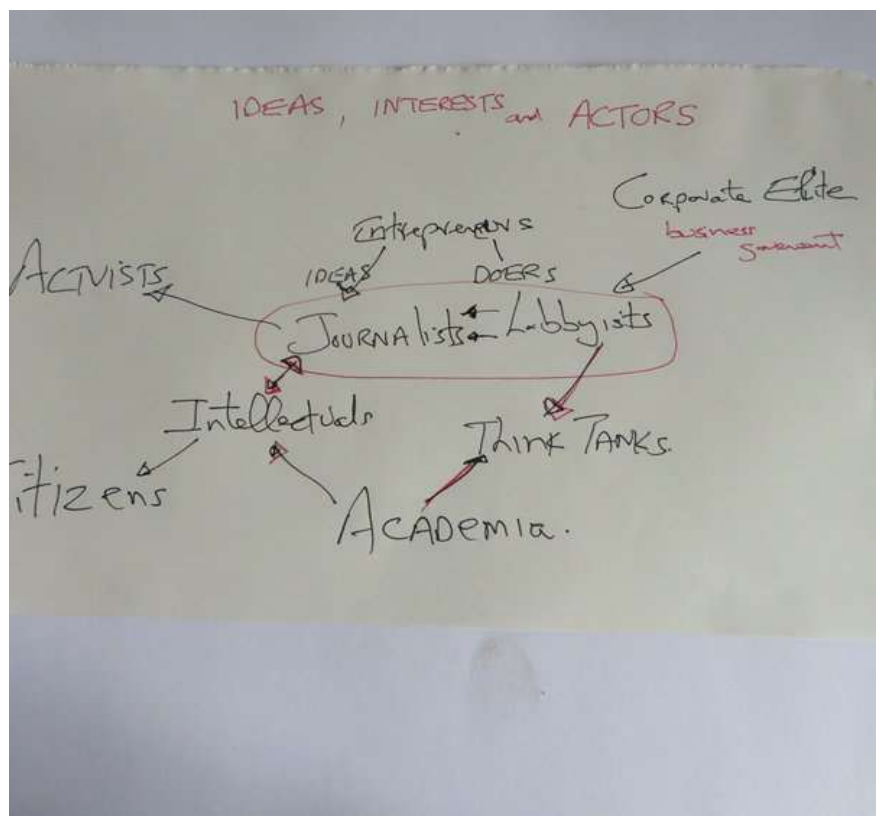
So anyone interested in the ups and downs of our economic system should be following these books…But, apart from a few years in the 1990s – when Notes for Change-Agents was drafted - I haven't done so. My focus, since 2000, has been a narrower economic one

Having realised the gap in my annotated bibliography, I found my next reaction to be an interesting one. It was to start scribbling a DIAGRAM to **identify how ideas circulate** and the role of **different groups in that process**. I had missed the business leaders - so who else should be in the picture?

The result – in my very bad scribble – I've called "IDEAS, INTERESTS AND ACTORS" although I do appreciate that the distinction between "ideas" and "interests" is a fine, if not false, one.

The following groups can be distinguished –

- **The Corporate Elite** (Business and Government). These are the big beasts – with the most obvious and selfish "interests" at stake. But they employ others to articulate these interests through stories which are fed to the public via lobbyists and think-tanks in the first instance and, more subtly, via academics and journalists.

- **entrepreneurs** – of two sorts, doers and idea merchants. This is a neglected group – some of the "doers" eventually join the corporate elite. And some of the "idea merchants" eventually join the intellectual populisers

- **Lobbyists** – millions of them who do the bidding of the corporate elite

- So called **Think-Tanks** – those set up in recent decades funded by the corporate elite (by

definition) and dancing to their tune. Generally plugged into academia the more useful of whose ideas they leach onto
- **Academics;** who are learning to communicate more clearly
- **Intellectual populisers**; who have learned the real tricks of story-telling and are loved by publishers
- **journalists**; who come in all shapes and sizes and on whom the public used to depend as the intermediary between power and themselves
- **activists**; who supply the basic energy for democratic life
- **citizens**; an increasingly passive group

Chris Hedges and the Triumph of the Spectacle

The United States of America prides itself on being the "leader of the free world". In reality it is a **deeply sick** society **whose only freedom is that of abuse** (in all the senses of that word) and the multiplicity of perverse ways it chooses to keep itself entertained.
Of course, it has its decent side – but independent voices are increasingly difficult to find. You can find Chomsky on Youtube and in bookshops – but rarely quoted in the media.

Chris Hedges is a rare voice of sanity whose articles I have been following this year on the brave Scheerpost site. His background is fascinating – a war correspondent who started out with the intention of being a churchman like his father and whose rebellious spirit saw him sacked from The New York Times for his vocal opposition to the Iraq War.
He has become a fairly prolific writer – turning out since 2002 almost a book a year.
His Wikipedia entry was clearly written by a corporate lobbyist!

Somewhat belatedly I have been reading his Empire of illusion – the end of literacy and the triumph of spectacle (it was published in 2010!) – which is a savage indictment of the depths to which the country has fallen in my lifetime,

> I used to live in a country called America. It was not a perfect country, especially if you were African American or Native American or of Japanese descent in the Second World War. It could be cruel and unjust if you were poor, gay, a woman, or an immigrant, but there was hope it could be better. It was a country I loved and honored.
> It paid its workers wages envied around the world. It made sure these workers, thanks to labor unions and champions of the working class in the Democratic Party and the press, had health benefits and pensions. It offered good, public education. It honored basic democratic values and held in regard the rule of law, including international law, and respect for human rights. It had social programs, from Head Start to welfare to Social Security, to take care of the weakest among us, the mentally ill, the elderly, and the destitute. It had a system of government that, however flawed, worked to protect the interests of most of its citizens. It offered the possibility of democratic change. It had a press that was diverse and independent and gave a voice to all segments of society, including those beyond our borders, to impart to us unpleasant truths, to challenge the powerful, to reveal ourselves to ourselves.
>
> **I am not blind to the imperfections of this old America, or the failures to meet these ideals consistently at home and abroad. I spent more than two years living in Roxbury, the inner city**

in Boston, across the street from a public housing project where I ran a small church as a seminarian at Harvard Divinity School. I saw institutional racism at work. I saw how banks, courts, dysfunctional schools, probation officers, broken homes, drug abuse, crime, and employers all conspired to make sure the poor remained poor. I spent two decades as a foreign correspondent in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans.

I saw there the crimes and injustices committed in our name and often with our support, whether during the contra war in Nicaragua or the brutalization of the Palestinians by Israeli occupation forces. We had much to atone for, but still there was also much that was good, decent, and honorable in our country.

The country I live in today uses the same civic, patriotic, and historical language to describe itself, the same symbols and iconography, the same national myths, but only the shell remains. The America we celebrate is an illusion. *America, the country of my birth, the country that formed and shaped me, the country of my father, my father's father, and his father's father, stretching back to the generations of my family that were here for the country's founding, is so diminished as to be unrecognizable. I do not know if this America will return, even as I pray and work and strive for its return.*

The words consent of the governed have become an empty phrase. Our textbooks on political science and economics are obsolete. **Our nation has been hijacked by oligarchs, corporations, and a narrow, selfish, political, and economic elite, a small and privileged group that governs, and often steals, on behalf of moneyed interests.** *This elite, in the name of patriotism and democracy, in the name of all the values that were once part of the American system and defined the Protestant work ethic, has systematically destroyed our manufacturing sector, looted the treasury, corrupted our democracy, and trashed the financial system.*

During this plundering we remained passive, mesmerized by the enticing shadows on the wall, assured our tickets to success, prosperity, and happiness were waiting around the corner. **The government, stripped of any real sovereignty, provides little more than technical expertise for elites and corporations that lack moral restraints and a concept of the common good. America has become a façade. It has become the greatest illusion in a culture of illusions.** *It represents a power and a democratic ethic it does not possess.*

Hardly surprisingly, the book was largely ignored by the corporate media – with one of the few (Canadian) reviewers lamenting that it didn't really tell him anything he didn't already know. But what I did appreciate – in the book's final chapter – was the tribute to "those who saw it all coming!

There were some who saw it coming. *The political philosophers Sheldon S. Wolin, John Ralston Saul, and Andrew Bacevich, writers such as Noam Chomsky, Chalmers Johnson, David Korten, and Naomi Klein, and activists such as Bill McKibben, Wendell Berry, and Ralph Nader warned us about our march of folly. In the immediate years after the Second World War, a previous generation of social critics recognized the destructive potential of the rising corporate state. Books such as David Riesman's "The Lonely Crowd", C. Wright Mills' "The Power Elite", William H. White's "The Organization Man", Seymour Mellman's "The Permanent War Economy: American Capitalism in Decline", Daniel Boorstin's "The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America", and Reinhold Niebuhr's "The Irony of American History" have proved to be prophetic. This generation of writers remembered what had been lost.*

They saw the intrinsic values that were being dismantled. The culture they sought to protect has

largely been obliterated. During the descent, our media and universities, extensions of corporate and mass culture, proved intellectually and morally useless. They did not thwart the decay. We failed to heed the wisdom of these critics, embracing instead the idea that all change was a form of progress.

Other Chris Hedges work
Wages of Rebellion – the moral imperative of revolt; Chris Hedges (2015)
https://scheerpost.com/2021/10/22/chris-hedges-god-caged-in-jersey/
Unspeakable Chris Hedges (2016) a collection of interview

Cultivating Change

Hanno Burmester is an interesting young German, a disappointed activist in the mainstream SDP before working at his own organisational consultancy for almost a decade, who has now produced a little book which argues that we need a "triple transformation" – in ourselves, in our organisations and in our social systems.
Nothing if not ambitious!
But the scale of the global crises we face requires nothing less

A have some annoying questions I raise whenever I'm tempted by a book's title or marketing – and this one's is **"Unlearn – a compass for radical transformation"**. For starters, does the author take the trouble in the Introduction to try to persuade me that the book deserves my precious time?
His answer is short and clear – few books deal with all three levels. Go into any bookshop and you will be directed to three different parts of the bookshop – self-help, business studies and politics/social change.

A second question I pose involves the reader going to the back of the book to find the "further reading" which, ideally, should explain why the author has selected each. I need this to give me a sense of the author's view of the world. In this case, I was simply given a list of a dozen books – half of which I knew but the other half not. They are –

> Tomas Bjorkman The World We Create 2019
> Fridjof Capra The systems view of life 2014
> Lizabeth Cohen A Consumer's Republic 2003
> Andre Gorz Farewell to the Working Class 1980
> Amitav Gosh The Great Derangement 2017
> Robert Kegan In Over our Heads – the mental demands of modern life 1995
> Naomi Klein This Changes Everything 2015
> Frederic Laloux Reinventing Organisations 2016
> Jonathan Rowson Spiritualise 2014
> Otto Scharmer Theory U 2007
> Roberto Unger Democracy Realised 2000

I very much appreciated that the list puts the anglo-saxons firmly in our place!
You would have thought that, when an author is dealing with three intertwined issues of such magnitude, he would need three times the text to conduct the argument ie a book of about 750

pages. But this one comes in at 135 pages!!
Surely a lot has been sacrificed?

But perhaps that just reveals my age!
My generation was the rationalistic one – and expected things to be proven – by detailed argument. HB's is more generous and..well...spiritual and rests more on appeal to values – and stories. He's pretty strong on self-analysis and, in his comments on organisations, I can hear the voices of Frederic Laloux and David Graeber. His final section on social transformation, however, does perhaps rely too much on the collapse of will of communist regimes in 1989-92.

His basic argument is that there is a "core self" which warns us when we are going against our nature and that we should listen to it. As individuals, organisation and societies we are too comfortable with the status quo and ignore the multiple signs of stress around us – be it depression, suicide, protest. His section on "things that hold us down" makes some good points. And the point of his title is that we all – at whatever level – need to prepare properly for what is involved as we make the necessary adjustments to our values and behaviour

But he doesn't seem to recognise the strength of the effort which the corporate system is putting into the fight to maintain its privileges.
And – if this is a compass – then I would have wished him to attach a few more pointers and resources to help us on his journey.

But I enjoyed the book – it is engaging and well-written/translated.
More importantly it made me think – and scribble notes to myself – always a tribute to a good read. For example I could see the link to older material such as Building the bridge as you walk on it (2004) by Robert Quinn about whom I have written several times here.
And the triple transformation is also a theme which crops up in Robin Skynner and John Cleese's Life – and how to survive it (1993) where a therapist and leading British comic

> have a Socratic dialogue about the initial stages of everyone's development – as babies weaning ourselves from our mothers, learning about the wider environment and coping with our feelings. They then use this understanding of the principles of healthy (family) relationships to explore the preconditions for healthy organisations and societies

But any reference to such texts would have made the text much longer – and the beauty of the book is its brevity!

Update; I'm remiss in forgetting to thank The Alternative website for alerting me to his book and they also have a feature on Tomas Bjorkman who is the first of the authors on Burmester's short reading list
https://archive.org/details/lifehowtosurvive00skyn

Stop the World – I want to get off

Yuval Harari famously wrote in 2016 "[Homo Deus – a brief history of tomorrow](link)" (the link gives you the full book) to which LRB devoted [an extensive review](link)

> *Once upon a time, we accepted three score years and ten as our divinely allotted lifespan; we reckoned there wasn't much we could do to prevent or counter epidemic disease; we looked on dearth and famine as bad hands dealt by fate or divine judgment; we considered war to be in the nature of things; and we believed that personal happiness was a matter of fortune.*
>
> *Now, Harari says, **these problems have all been reconfigured as managerial projects, subject to political will but not limited by the insufficiencies of our knowledge or technique**. We have become the masters of our own fate – and 'fate' itself should be reconceived as an agenda for further research and intervention. That is what it means to refer to the world era in which we live as the Anthropocene: one biological species, Homo sapiens, has become a major agent in shaping the natural circumstances of its own existence. The gods once made sport of us; the future will 'upgrade humans into gods, and turn Homo sapiens into Homo deus'……*
>
> *The current version of Homo sapiens will become surplus to economic and military requirements. War will be waged by drones and work will be done by robots: 'Some economists predict that sooner or later, unenhanced humans will be completely useless.' Algorithms embedded in silicon and metal will replace algorithms embedded in flesh, which, Harari reminds us, is what biology and computer science tell us is all we really are anyway…..*
>
> *Wealth will be concentrated in the hands of the 'tiny elite that owns the all-powerful algorithms'. Some of us will then be as gods: members of a new species, Homo deus, 'a new elite of upgraded superhumans' clever enough, and rich enough, to control for a time the knowledge that controls the rest of humankind, and to command the resources needed to transform themselves through intellectual tools and biologic prostheses. 'In the long run, we are all dead,' Keynes said. If some of the wilder ambitions of anti-ageing prophets are realised, the dictum will need to be reformulated: 'In the long run, most of us will be dead.'…*

I remember reading the first 50 pages of "Homo Deus" and feeling that this and a couple of other reviews had told me all I needed to know about the book. I was eager to see what his "[21 Lessons for the 21st Century](link)" (2018) held for me….Once I realised that it consists of a lot of op-eds and answers to his fan-club mail, I decided against reading it. A [contrarian article](link) and a "d[igested read](link)" tend to confirm my prejudice….

If you can't be bothered to read these two books of his or a [post of mine from last year](link) which tried to give a sense of the basic argument, then you will perhaps find more exciting **[this hour-long video discussion between Harari and Jonathan Haidt](link), the social psychologist** whose "[The Righteous Mind" I enthused over](link) a couple of years ago.

Haidt start the discussion by articulating a concern he feels about trends in social media, AI and the incredible rate at which the world is changing. It's a really great discussion and I thoroughly recommend it. It certainly made me realise that I had been a bit unfair to Harari and should certainly persevere with his "[21 Lessons for the 21st Century](link)"

One of the reasons the video gripped me is because of the obvious respect the two men have for one another. It's so great to see a serious discussion of ideas

And if that does in fact grab you, then I would suggest you [view a discussion between Harari and the author](#) of another book I enthused about recently – [Rutger Bregman's Humankind – an optimistic history](#). Indeed I was so impressed with Bregman's book that I did one of my [famous tables summarising the various myths he exposed](#).

Other Assessments of Harari
A [profile of Harari in The New Yorker](#) revealed that a team of eight people supports him in his various speaking and writing endeavours. Doesn't that risk "groupthink"???
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/24/homo-deus-by-yuval-noah-harari-review from the ever-thoughtful and challenging David Runciman..
https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/a-big-history-of-the-future/
https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/15/21-lessons-for-the-21st-century-by-yuval-noah-harari-review
https://quillette.com/2018/10/26/21-lessons-for-the-21st-century-a-review/
https://www.vox.com/podcasts/2019/1/11/18178800/jonathan-haidt-coddling-american-mind-book-nyu-scott-galloway-pivot-podcast
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2021/08/reading-as-conversation.html

Is Patriotism the answer?

The discussions about the "limits to growth" have been going on for at least 50 years. Any serious threat to the conventional wisdom goes through several phases - initially ignored, then treated with ridicule. When the attacks start, it's a clear indication that vested interests recognise they are in danger and need to change their tune. **Perhaps the most dangerous phase** (from the point of view of those challenging the prevailing consensus) is **when the threatening ideas are accepted as the new wisdom -** at which point a variety of delaying tactics can be deployed.
Something significant seemed to have happened just a few years ago – with Greta Thurberg, [Extinction Rebellion](#) and the Green New Deal being straws in the wind. Climate Change has gone mainstream. Even the mass media find it difficult to resist the conclusion that it's for real..
Of course, the world remains divided between those convinced by the science and the "denialists" who share two important attitudes - a scepticism about scientific claims and a resistance to change. But the Chinese government made the call about a decade ago for a transition to a greener economy – although it's still a serious polluter. The US government is struggling to get a serious policy accepted by its Congress. The British government talks the talk but is unable to demonstrate any serious policies.

The books about climate change have been pouring from the press for some 30 years and more – with Bill McKibben's "[The End of Nature – humanity, climate change and the natural world](#)" being one of the earliest in 1989. I've listed other texts I've found important in the reading list below.

I've just finished a couple of fascinating new books which couldn't be more different – the first [Post Growth – life after capitalism](#) (2021) by economist (in sustainable development) Tim Jackson; the other "[Climate Change and the Nation State – the realist case](#)" (2020) by geopolitical strategist Anatol Lieven.
The first is fairly dismissive of the Green New Deal – the second considers it a sine qua non.

Lieven's book is the more conventional in conducting a sustained argument – Jackson's is almost poetic in tone and is populated with characters about whom he tells gripping stories.
Not for nothing is he also a dramatist!
The idea of deliberately choosing to slow down economic growth – let alone to pursue "degrowth" – is not one to which this blog has given any serious consideration. So Jackson's book deserves an exclusive post.

I would summarise Lieven's basic argument thus -
- Climate change has become the world's number one problem
- It can be tackled only at a national level
- At the moment only some voices in the military and in insurance companies recognize the seriousness
- No real strong pressure is being exerted where it matters
- Consensus needs to be built
- That possibility is being undermined by identity politics

And some selected excerpts -

The social and political danger to Western states is greater in the next decades even than most climate change scientists realize, because the effects of climate change will combine with two other critical challenges for Western societies: automation and artificial intelligence, which threaten the whole contemporary structure of employment, and migration. In combination with white nationalism, mass migration threatens irredeemably to divide societies and paralyze their political systems. Part of the background noise to the writing of this book strongly increased my fears in this regard: not just the Trump administration in the United States and the rise of chauvinist parties in Europe, but the amazing magic show called Brexit, in which a political order once renowned for its pragmatism and common sense transformed itself into play dough before our very eyes.

Populations have become divided in their fundamental understandings of their own national identities: in the United States, believers in a multi-cultural country defined by ideology and defined by multiple identities against believers in a cultural community chiefly defined by a confused appeal to an Anglo-American heritage; in Britain, believers in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic Britain as part of the European Union against believers in an independent England defined by its own national history. As the miserable examples of Turkey and Egypt demonstrate, it is impossible to make democracy work when at each election, not policies but the very definition of the nation itself is at stake.

Such fractured political systems will have even less ability to do anything serious about anthropogenic climate change. Unless Western democracies can summon up the will to address these challenges, they will ultimately face a choice between authoritarian rule and complete political and social collapse. Having worked in Russia during the near collapse of the state and society in the 1990s, such a scenario is for me not a futurist fantasy but a vivid memory.

Some of the Books in the subject which have made an impact on me

– Blessed Unrest - how the largest social movement in history is restoring grace, justice and beauty to the world; Paul Hawken (2007); Beautifully-written history of the environmental movement, with particular emphasis on the contemporary aspects. Very detailed annex.

– "Storms of my Grandchildren – the truth about the coming climate catastrophe and our last chance to save humanity"; James Hansen (2009). A powerful story of how one scientist has tried to warn us

– Why we Disagree on Climate Change – understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity; Mike Hulme (2009). An environmental scientist Professor takes a rare and deep look into our cultural disagreements – using anthropological insights

– This Changes Everything – capitalism v the climate; Naomi Klein (2014). This book by the Canadian journalist is written for those who are already convinced about the need for urgent action. Those new to the issue should first read books such as "The Uninhabitable Earth" and Lynas to get a sense of how bad things are. A couple of reviews give excellent and detailed summaries which will help you select the most appropriate part of Klein's book (the link in the title gives the entire text). The first is here. The second review gives a useful summary of the scientific issues at stake and then of each chapter. Another review gives a more selective summary

– TheUninhabitable Earth – life after warming; David Wallace-Wells (2019) This highly readable book from a journalist who has compressed his extensive reading into a series of short, very punchy chapters can be accessed by clicking the title.

– Commanding Hope – the power we have to renew a world in peril" (2020) which is one of the very few books I've seen which takes the crisis as read - and chooses instead to use our own reluctance to change our habits as the key with which to explore the values and worldviews lying at the heart of the different sense of identity we all have. (I wasn't aware that Clive Hamilton produced Requiem for a species – why we resist the truth about climate change (2010) although only one chapter of the book seems to deal directly with the question in the subtitle).

Some previous posts on the issue

https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2020/12/commanding-hope.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2020/03/facing-extinction.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2014/07/why-we-disagree-on-wicked-problems.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2019/07/what-is-wrong-with-us.html

The acceptable face of national pride?

The Romanian flags are flapping strongly in the Ploiesti breeze today and the national anthem and male choral music is blasting from the Cathedral's loudspeakers as the country celebrates National Day – going back to 1918 when the Romania we know today was first formed out of the ruins of the Hapsburg Empire.

Pride in one's country is a noticeable feature these days – although many countries (Britain being a prime example) have very little to be proud of. It was Samuel Johnson who said that "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel" although he was not referring to patriotism in general but rather Prime Minister William Pitt's abuse of it…..

A couple of weeks ago, I referred to Climate Change and the Nation State – the realist case" (2020) by geopolitical strategist Anatol Lieven whose basic argument I summarised as -

- Climate change has become the world's number one problem
- It can be tackled only at a national level
- At the moment only some voices in the military and in insurance companies recognize the seriousness
- No real strong pressure is being exerted where it matters
- Consensus needs to be built

- That possibility is being undermined by identity politics

And Wolfgang Streeck has penned an explosive article reminding us that the EU's commitment to the free flow of labour and capital is a defining feature of neoliberalism and that -

> *Strange things are happening in Brussels, and getting stranger by the day. The European Union (EU), a potential superstate beholden to a staggering democratic deficit, is preparing to punish two of its member states and their elected governments, along with the citizens who elected them, for what it considers a democratic deficit.*
> *For its part, the EU is governed by an unelected technocracy, by a constitution devoid of people and consisting of a series of unintelligible international treaties, by rulings handed down by an international court, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), as well as by a parliament that is not allowed to legislate and knows no opposition. **Moreover, treaties cannot be reviewed in practice and rulings can only be reviewed by the Court itself.***
>
> *The current issue is an old one, but it has long been avoided, in the best tradition of the European Union, so as not to wake sleeping dogs. To what extent does "European" law, made by national governments meeting behind closed doors in the European Council and elaborated in the secret chambers of the ECJU, trump national law passed by the democratic member states of the European Union? The answer seems obvious to simple minds unversed in EU affairs: where, and only where, the member states, in accordance with the terms of the Treaties (written with a capital T in Brussels presumably to indicate their sublime nature), have conferred on the EU the right to legislate in a way that is binding on all of them…..*

In his bid for the French Presidency, Michel Barnier has amazed everyone by suggesting that the free flow of labour needs some limits and qualifications
As a sceptic and as a Scot, I have an ambivalent attitude to nationalism – recognising the powerful force it has been in history but still believing that it has its gentler side. The New Statesman ran a good feature recently which did justice to the complexity of the issue.

Military Madness
According to the Doomsday Clock we are only 100 seconds from nuclear catastrophe – the shortest point for which this disaster has been predicted in the 70 years since scientists started the Doomsday Clock.
Last week I viewed for a second time the 2000 remake of the original 1964 Fail Safe film made by Sydney Lumet. The black and white tones of the remake helped its impact as well as its focus on 3 basic locations - the control room where representative of the industrial complex strutted, Harvey Keitel and a Dr Strangelove lookalike initially disputed and the miscommunications drama played out; President Richard Dreyfuss and an interpreter made telephone contact with their Russian counterparts; and the cockpit of George Clooney's plane as he zeroed in on Moscow.
An article in today's Guardian about a journalist's experience with a nuclear attack simulation is a powerful read

> *I could kill up to 45 million if I chose the more comprehensive of the alternatives laid out on three pieces of paper, but it was hard to focus on the details because there were people shouting at me*

through my earpiece and from the screens in front of me.
I was experiencing what a US president would have to do in the event of a nuclear crisis: make a decision that would end many millions of lives – and quite possibly life on the planet – with incomplete information and in less than 15 minutes.
In the real world, I was in a meeting room in a Washington hotel, but with virtual reality goggles strapped on. I was sitting behind the president's desk in the Oval Office. The television news was on and there was a report about Russian troop movements, but the volume was muted and someone was telling me the national security adviser was running late aimed at our meeting.

It took me back to the mid 1980s when I sponsored a public showing of a famous documentary The War Game by Peter Watkins which had been banned for 20 years – and when we expected the police to move in at any moment. Google tells me that in Sept 1984 a documentary called Threads was aired on BBC – but I have no recollection of that one. The American military is completely out of control – with its political class giving it $25 billion more than it actually asked for. Even Scientific American is arguing that this has to stop.

The new face of power

There are very few of us who dare to challenge technological change. Most of us fear the ridicule involved – being the targets of taunts of being Canutes or Luddites
It, therefore, took a lot of courage for Jerry Mander in 1978 to produce Four Arguments for the elimination of television and for Neil Postman to follow this up with "Amusing Ourselves to Death" in 1985.
And, with his "In the absence of the sacred – the failure of technology" (1992) Jerry Mander went beyond television to critique our technological society as a whole.

> *In this provocative work, Mander challenges the utopian promise of technological society and tracks its devastating impact on cultures worldwide. The Western world's loss of a sense of the sacred in the natural world, he says, has led us toward global environmental disaster and social disorder - and worse lies ahead. Yet models for restoring our relationship with the Earth exist in the cultures of native peoples, whose values and skills have enabled them to survive centuries of invasion and exploitation.*
>
> *Far from creating paradise on Earth, technology has instead produced an unsustainable contest for resources. Mander surveys the major technologies shaping the "new world order", computers, telecommunications, space exploration, genetic engineering, robotics, and the corporation itself and warns that they are merging into a global mega-technology, with dire environmental and political results.*

Needless to say, none of such book were taken seriously. It took perhaps a BBC television series of technological dystopia Black Mirror – which first hit screens exactly a decade ago – for us to begin to realise that technology (in the shape of the social media) has its perverse side.

John McNaughton is a highly-respected commentator on technology and had a powerful piece a few days ago which led me to a review of two books in The Boston Review which is beginning to rival the New York Review of Books for the power of its analysis

The books are "[System Error: Where Big Tech Went Wrong and How We Can Reboot](#)" by Jeremy Weinstein, Mehran Sahami, and Rob Reich and "[Solving Public Problems: A Practical Guide to Fix Our Government and Change Our World](#)" by Beth Noveck

> *Each makes important contributions. "System Error" breaks new ground in explaining why Silicon Valley (SV) is wreaking havoc on U.S. politics and offers uniformly thoughtful reforms. "Solving Public Problems", on the other hand, offers possibly the most detailed and serious treatment of how digital tools help enhance democratic governance around the world. Neither, however, answers the question implicitly posed by opening their books with a description of U.S. democracy's failure: What happens now, after January 6?*

> *"System Error's" greatest contribution to public debate is to identify more precisely how Silicon Salley (SV) went wrong. Books such as Shoshana Zuboff's "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" depict SV as a vast devouring Moloch, perfecting the means to manipulate human behavior. Others, such as Roger McNamee's "Zucked", focus on the business side. These books help correct an imbalance in public debate, which just a few years ago treated business leaders like Mark Zuckerberg as heroes, and took Facebook seriously when it claimed it was spreading freedom and building a new cosmopolitan world where borders didn't matter and everyone was connected. But these books don't get at the core problem, which is a product of the powerful mathematical techniques that drive SV's business model.*

> ### Optimisation
> *"System Error" explains that SV's ability to turn complicated situations into optimization problems accounts for both its successes and its most appalling failures. Optimization lies behind the ubiquitous use of machine learning and automated feedback, the relentless "solutionism" described by Evgeny Morozov, and SV CEOs' obsession with metrics. It is a mathematical technique that allows engineers to formalize complex problems and make them tractable, abstracting away most of the messiness of the real world. F. A. Hayek wrote of the "religion of the engineers"—their modern heirs are animated by the faith that seemingly impossible problems can be solved through math, blazing a path to a brighter world……*
> *Optimization underlies what used to be exuberant and refreshing about SV, and very often still is. Engineers are impatient with intellectual analyses that aim to understand problems and debates rather than solve them. When engineers unleashed their energies on big social problems, such as bringing down the cost of rocket launches or making video conferencing at scale rapidly possible during a pandemic, it turned out that many things could and did get done.*
> *Optimization allows engineers to formalize complex problems and erase the messiness of the real world, **but it cannot reconcile people's conflicting world views.***

I've started to read "System Error". It's highly readable – although I felt it was telling me more than I needed to know about its commercial side. It come in at 400 pages and, in my humble view, could do with some tough editing. **How often do I have to say to writers and publishers – you are flooding us with so much material that you need to discipline yourselves** and slim your material down. We simply don't have the time available to do justice to all the books we want to read! Having said that, let me quote from its opening section -

> *"We must resist this temptation to think in extremes. Both techno-utopianism and -dystopianism are all too facile and simplistic outlooks for our complex age.*
> *Instead of taking the easy way out or throwing our hands up in the air, we must rise to the defining challenge of our era: harnessing technological progress to serve rather than subvert the interests of individuals and societies. This task is not one for technologists alone but for all of us. Tackling this challenge begins with recognizing that new technologies create civic and social by-products, or, in the language of economics, externalities. Big, unregulated tech companies that harvest our private data and sell them to the highest bidder are not that different from chemical plants; it's just the type of dumping that is different".*

And it makes some important points eg

Against democracy

SV bet that political problems would evaporate under a benevolent technocracy. Reasonable people, once they got away from the artificial disagreement imposed by older and cruder ways of thinking, would surely cooperate and agree on the right solutions. Advances in measurement and computational capacity would finally build a Tower of Babel that reached the heavens.

Facebook's corporate religion held that cooperation would blossom as its social network drew the world together. Meanwhile, Google's founder Sergey Brin argued that the politicians who won national elections should "withdraw from [their] respective parties and govern as independents in name and in spirit."

"System Error" recounts how Reich was invited to a private dinner of SV leaders who wanted to figure out how to build the ideal society to maximize scientific and technological progress. When Reich asked whether this society would be democratic, he was scornfully told that democracy holds back progress. The participants struggled with how to attract people to move to or vote for such a society. Still, they assumed that as SV reshaped the world, democratic politics—with its messiness, factionalism, and hostility to innovation—would give way to cleaner, more functional systems that deliver what people really want. Of course, this did not work. Reich and his co-authors (who all teach at Stanford and are refreshingly blunt about the University's role in creating this mindset) explain how their undergraduates idolize entrepreneurs who move fast and break things. In contrast, as then-Stanford president John Hennessy once told Joshua Cohen, it would be ridiculous for Stanford students to want to go into government.

Maximising profits

As "System Error" explains, optimization theory worked well in harness with its close cousin, the "Objectives and Key Results" (OKR) management philosophy, pioneered by Andy Grove at Intel, to align engineering insight with profit-making intent. For a little while, the mythology of optimization allowed entrepreneurs to convince themselves that they were doing good by virtue of doing well. When Facebook connected people, it believed it made everyone better off—including the advertisers who paid Facebook to access its users. Keeping users happy through algorithms that maximized "engagement" also kept their eyes focused on the ads that paid for the endless streams of user posts, tweets, and videos.

But politics kept creeping back in—and in increasingly unpleasant ways. It became clear that Facebook and other SV platforms were fostering profound division: enabling the persecution of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar, allowing India's BJP party to foster ethnic hatred, and magnifying the influence of the U.S. far right.

As the chorus of objections grew, Facebook drowned it out by singing the corporate hymn ever more fervently. The company's current Chief Technology Officer argued in a 2016 internal memo that Facebook's power "to connect people" was a global mission of transformation, which justified the questionable privacy practices and occasional lives lost from bullying into suicide or terrorist attacks organized on the platform. Connecting people via Facebook was "de facto good"; it unified a world divided by borders and languages.

Annexes

1.   **About the Blog**

2.   **About the author**

3.   **The Author's other publications**

Annex 1 About the Blog

"How can I know what I think until I read what I write?"
Henry James

This is a book of reflections from a blog, "[Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#), which has run from late 2009 - when I started to have time for more reflection about some of the big themes which have engaged my life and work.

I've been a nomad for 30 years and based, for the past 10 years, alternating each year Bulgaria and Romania – winters in Sofia, summers in my mountain house in Transylvania. The posts started in my mountain house in the Carpathians and continued in Bucharest and Sofia…….

The word "blog" has become so ubiquitous a term that we tend to have forgotten its etymology – "web log". An eloquent essay [Why I blog](#) surveys the world of blogging and gives this account of the second term –

A ship's log owes its name to a small wooden board, often weighted with lead, that was for centuries attached to a line and thrown over the stern. The weight of the log would keep it in the same place in the water, like a provisional anchor, while the ship moved away. By measuring the length of line used up in a set period of time, mariners could calculate the speed of their journey (the rope itself was marked by equidistant "knots" for easy measurement). As a ship's voyage progressed, the course came to be marked down in a book that was called a log.

In journeys at sea that took place before radio or radar or satellites or sonar, these logs were an indispensable source for recording what actually happened. They helped navigators surmise where they were and how far they had travelled and how much longer they had to stay at sea. They provided accountability to a ship's owners and traders. They were designed to be as immune to faking as possible. Away from land, there was usually no reliable corroboration of events apart from the crew's own account in the middle of an expanse of blue and grey and green; and in long journeys, memories always blur and facts disperse. A log provided as accurate an account as could be gleaned in real time.
It continues –

As you read a log, you have the curious sense of moving backward in time as you move forward in pages—the opposite of a book. As you piece together a narrative that was never intended as one, it seems—and is—more truthful. Logs, in this sense, were a form of human self-correction. They amended for hindsight, for the ways in which human beings order and tidy and construct the story of their lives as they look back on them. Logs require a letting-go of narrative because they do not allow for a knowledge of the ending. So

they have plot as well as dramatic irony—the reader will know the ending before the writer did.

How Blogging improves your Life

Of course, blogging is seen by many as a bit narcissistic- a reflection of the "selfie" age we live in…But there are blogs….and blogs….Self-indulgent "look at me!" ones and blobs of erudite text which few can understand…..And it can get you into trouble …. One academic blogger, famously, found himself out of work as a result of his blogging (in the early days) and wrote to tell the tale – in A Blogger's Manifesto

I would like to hope that readers come to my site looking for some originality – be it the diversity of the topics (and experiences) the posts deal with; the thematic summaries (eg on memoirs or mountain villages); the range of the references in the hyperlinks; the glimpses of rarely seen painting traditions and, who knows, perhaps even the celebration of good writing.

One writer offers no less than 15 justifications for why people should blog. I would go with nine –
1. You'll become a better thinker. Because the process of writing includes recording thoughts on paper, the blogging process makes you question what you thought you knew. You will delve deeper into the matters of your life and the worldview that shapes them.
2. You'll become a better writer. – once, that is, you start to reread your material or get feedback which shows your text was ambiguous…
3. You'll live a more intentional life. Once you start writing about your life and the thoughts that shape it, you'll begin thinking more intentionally about who you are, who you are becoming, and whether you like what you see or not. And that just may be reason enough to get started.
4. You'll develop an eye for meaningful things. By necessity, blogging requires a filter. It's simply not possible to write about every event, every thought, and every happening in your life. Instead, blogging is a never-ending process of choosing to articulate the most meaningful events and the most important thoughts. This process of choice helps you develop an eye for meaningful things.
5. It'll lead to healthier life habits (although my partner doesn't agree!)!. Blogging requires time, devotion, commitment, and discipline. And just to be clear, those are all good things to embrace – they will help you get the most out of your days and life.
6. You'll inspire others. Blogging not only changes your life, it also changes the life of the reader. And because blogs are free for the audience and open to the public, on many levels, it is an act of giving. It is a selfless act of service to invest your time, energy, and worldview into a piece of writing and then offer it free to anybody who wants to read it. Others will find inspiration in your writing… and that's a wonderful feeling.
7. You'll become more well-rounded in your mindset. After all, blogging is an exercise in give-and-take. One of the greatest differences between blogging and traditional publishing is the opportunity for readers to offer input. As the blog's writer, you introduce a topic that you feel is significant and meaningful. You take time to lay out a subject in the minds of your readers and offer your thoughts on the topic. Then, the readers get to respond. And often times, their responses in the comment section challenge us to take a new, fresh look at the very topic we thought was so important in the first place.
8. It'll serve as a personal journal. It trains our minds to track life and articulate the changes we are experiencing. Your blog becomes a digital record of your life that is saved "in the cloud." As a result, it can never be lost, stolen, or destroyed in a fire.
9. You'll become more confident. Blogging will help you discover more confidence in your life. You will quickly realize that you do live an important life with a unique view and have something to offer others.

That puts it rather well – although I would amplify the first point by emphasising the sharpened critical

faculty regular blogging also brings to the reading of what others write. Thomas Hardy was spot on when he (apparently) said - "How can I know what I think until I read what I write?" You thought you knew something but, when you read back your own first effort at explanation, you immediately have questions – both of substance and style.

But this also conveys itself very quickly to changes in the way that you read other people's material – you learn more and faster from a critical dialogue (even with yourself) than from passive reading…..

That's why they say that the best way to learn about a subject is to (try to) write a book about it (rather than reading several books). It sounds paradoxical (as well as presumptuous) but it's actually true – and the reason is simple.

When you start to put on paper an explanation of what you imagined you had understood from reading some books, you quickly realise that you had not properly understood the issue; and that you have questions with which you need to interrogate the books. Translating your imagined understanding into a written summary allows a dialogue with the books – which has the added advantage of helping you better remember the issues….

Blogger Duncan Green makes another important point that –

> regular blogging builds up a handy, time-saving archive. I've been blogging daily since 2008. OK, that's a little excessive, but what that means is that essentially I have a download of my brain activity over the last 7 years – almost every book and papers I've read, conversations and debates.
> Whenever anyone wants to consult me, I have a set of links I can send (which saves huge amounts of time). And raw material for the next presentation, paper or book.

Green is spot on about the help a blog like mine offers in finding old material…you just type in the keyword and the relevant post with its quotes and hyperlinks generally appears immediately – a record of your (and others') brain activity that particular morning. I also have a file of more than 100 pages for each year with raw text and thousands of hyperlinks which didn't make it to the blog……an amazing archive of months of brain activity which, of course, needs a bit more time to access……

But both he and the list of justifications underestimate the significance of the blog's facility to archive and find hyperlinks. Very little of what I download do I actually read – although it is there in carefully labelled folders. But one of the world's great frustrations for people like me is remembering you've downloaded a paper but not knowing which folder it's in…that's where the blog archives are priceless…..

In what sense is it different from other blogs?

Mine is a blog which eschews the never-ending news cycle or the partiality of disciplinary lens and disputes and focuses rather on "wicked issues" and on books. In that respect, it is unlike most blogs.

Readers of blogs expect them to be frequently updated and will soon stop visiting sites which remain static…….as mine did for a month toward the end of the year…….Although critics of the net say that hyperlinking tends to encourage partisan reading, I have a folder with the sites of some 200 other bloggers whom I rarely access – the main reason being the predictability of what they say….

My claim for the reader's attention is simply expressed –
- experience in a variety of sectors (and countries) - normally closely manned with "gatekeepers"
- the compulsion (now almost 50 years old), to record what I felt were the lessons of each experience in short papers
- Long and extensive reading
- A "voice" which has been honed by the necessity of speaking clearly to audiences of different nationalities and class
- intensive trawling of the internet for wide range of writing

- notes kept of the most important of those readings
- shared in hyperlinks with readers

I confess somewhere to an aversion to those writers (so many!) who try to pretend they have a unique perspective on an issue and whose discordant babble make the world such a difficult place to understand.

I look instead for work which, as google puts it, builds on the shoulders of others……my role in a team is that of the resource person….who finds and shares material….

Academia, politics and free-lance consultancy has given me the freedom for 40 years to "do it my way" – and to write and publish in a fairly carefree manner.

For me a post written 4-5 years ago is every bit as good as (perhaps better than) yesterday's - but the construction of blogs permits only the most recent posts to be shown. A book format, on the other hand, requires that we begin……at the beginning ... It also challenges the author to reflect more critically on the coherence of his thinking …….

It was only in 2014 that I started to publish annual collections of these posts - part of a stand against the ephemerality which besmirches our lives – the earlier versions can be accessed here.

This blog celebrated its tenth birthday at the end of 2019. In eleven years there have been 1,500 posts. That's almost 3 a week – with each post taking up almost a full morning (once you take the researching into account). Quite a bit out of one's time – justifiable if something worthwhile is left behind

It took me some time to realise that the blog contained an amazing resource for English-speakers….the top-right corner has the list of E-books which have resulted from a careful selection and editing of the posts. They are, effectively, annotated guides to such subjects as -
- The critical writing of the past century about our economic system
- The literature on administrative reform
- Scottish independence
- Cultural aspects of Romania
- Cultural aspects of Bulgaria
- Cultural aspects of Germany

I can safely say that no such guides exist elsewhere in the English language. But I'm not able to crack the question of their wider dissemination. They're not much use if noone knows of their existence!!

Ironically, however, the "resource" offered by the reading lists which have become such a feature of the blog is not something I personally seem to avail myself of! I tend all too often to "skim and save" – and generally fail to return to the link and read it properly.

Every now and then I go back to the original aims I set for the blog and check the extent to which the posts still express them. This is what I intended in 2009 -
- This blog will try to make sense of the organisational endeavours I've been involved in; to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history (let alone hope).
- I read a lot and want to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination to read widely.
- A final motive for the blog is more complicated - and has to do with life and family. What have we done with our life? What is important to us?

I felt that the blog still pursues these objectives – although I did add a few years ago that -

The world seems confronted with new problems which apparently require new thinking…….and make obsolete writings before (say) 1990?…Because I've kept a good record of my wide reading since 1960, I would dispute this….the old themes are still there – although they may require a bit of dusting…..particularly of language
I have therefore become more conscious of the importance of my role in giving annotated reading lists - and, even more passionately about the need for clarity of expression!!. This explains the emphasis I increasingly place on tables – which act as discipline on verbosity.
I am perhaps using posts even more deliberately these days as a means of getting inspiration to help me express better my thoughts on reform and social change issues….When I click open text I have been working on for some time, my creativity tends to freeze – but when I confront a blank page, the words come together to form a new perspective……
As I move through my "autumn days" and feel the approach of winter, the "settling of final accounts" (in the spiritual sense) becomes perhaps a more dominant theme

The urge to share one's uncertainties with a wide and unknown audience is a curious inclination whose origin can be traced, in my case, to 1970 when I founded a Local Government Research Unit which allowed me to scribble longwinded essays about the new ideas of community action, participation and corporate management which had been circulating in 1960s Britain. The essays, with titles such as "Radical Review of Municipal Management" and "From Community Action to Corporate Management", appeared in the Unit's Occasional Papers which were bought by the occasional official - and some of them can still be found at the bottom of dusty piles in Scottish second-hand bookshops…

I would annoy my political colleagues with shorter think-pieces which would question why we were not achieving more…The 10,000 word article entitled Community Development – its political and administrative challenge (1977) was a longer, more academic article - as was the chapter Scottish local government – what future? in the Scottish Government Yearbook of 1984
I continued the habit when I started my consultancy work in 1991 with the European Commission ,eg
Learning from Experience – the Bulgarian case (2009)

So blogging came fairly naturally to me when I eventually found time to embrace it in 2009 - with early posts covering the lessons of my Scottish and then institutional building experience on a website called www.publicadminreform.webs

Annex 2 About the author

"Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland – 22 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.
His next 22 years were spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia – generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.
Between 2012 and 2017 he divided his time tasting wines and paintings from a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains. The last 3 years he has lived exclusively in Romania

In such a manner is a life normally described – and how little of the hopes, pleasures and anguishes of life does it give away….so the following lines try to be more honest and revealing… ..
In 2008 I started a website which contains the major papers written over the years about attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles I'm lucky enough to have played - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propoganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.
The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

Since 2009 my blog - Balkan and Carpathian Musings - has tried to make sense of my organisational endeavours - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the endeavour of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

I've had the good fortune -
- to work from an early age (26) with an unusually wide range of people (professionals, politicians, community activists – and a much smaller number of academics) who shared an aspiration to improve social conditions;
- To have had a job in a Polytechnic (and planning school) in the 1970s and first half of the 1980s which gave me the licence to talk and write about the issues relating to this work
- to have achieved a position of influence which helped develop a more inclusive style of government in the West of Scotland for 20 years
- to reengineer myself as a consultant, working and living for 25 years in central Europe and Central Asia – in the pursuit of what the turgid academic literature has come to call "good governance"
- all the while trying – through wide reading and writing - to try to make sense of what the masthead on my blog calls our "social endeavours", ie efforts to make the world a better place…

I've always had great difficulty answering the simple question "What do you do?" "Student" was easy but, after graduation, I had a quick succession of jobs in what could be called generally the "planning" field - and "planner" is as vague a term as "manager" and enjoyed a rather limited vogue. In 1968 I joined a polytechnic and was also elected to a town council – so "lecturer" was as good a description as what I did as any. Using my voice was what I was paid for – whether to transmit information or opinions. I read widely – so "reader" was also a pertinent word. I became heavily involved in community development – managing to straddle the worlds of community action and

political bureaucracy (for 20 years I was the Secretary of ruling Labour groups in municipal and regional Councils and also a sponsor of community action) and figured in a book about "reticulists" (networkers) – but imagine putting that word in a passport application!

For a few years I was Director of a so-called "Research Unit" which was more like a Think Tank in its proselytising workshops and publications celebrating the new rationalism of corporate management and community development.
At age 43 my default activity became full-time (regional) politics – with a leader role but of a rather maverick nature who never aspired to the top job but was content to be at the interstices of bureaucracy, politics and academia. I remember my reception at an OECD function in central Sweden as someone with a proclivity to challenge.

All this paved the way for the "consultancy" which I have apparently practised for the past 20 years in Central Europe and Central Asia. But "consultant" is not only a vague but a (rightly) increasingly insulting term – so I was tempted for a period to enter the word "writer" on my Visa application forms since this was as good a description of what I actually did as any. At one stage indeed, my despairing Secretary in the Region had actually given me the nickname "Paperback writer". Except that this was seen by many border guards in central Asia as a threating activity! Robert Reich's "symbolic analyst" briefly tempted – but was perhaps too close to the term "spy"!

When I did the [Belbin test on team roles](#) to which I was subjecting my teams, I had expected to come out as a leader – but was not altogether surprised to discover that my stronger role was a "resource person" – someone who surfed information and knowledge widely and shared it. What some people saw as the utopian streak in my writing gave me the idea of using the term "poet" at the airport guiches – but I have a poor memory for verse.
This morning, as I looked around at the various artefacts in the house, a new label came to me – "collector"! I collect beautiful objects – not only books and paintings but pottery, pens, pencils, laquered cases, miniatures, carpets, Uzbek wall-hangings, Kyrgyz and Iranian table coverings, glassware, terrace cotta figurines, plates, Chinese screens, wooden carvings et al. Of very little - except sentimental - value I hasten to add! But, of course, I have these things simply because I have been an "explorer" – first of ideas (desperately searching for the holy grail) and then of countries – in the 1980s Western Europe, the 1990s central Europe – finally central Asia and beyond.

Some 25 years ago, when I was going through some difficult times, my sister-in-law tried to help me by encouraging me to explore the various roles I had – father, son, husband, politician, writer, activist etc. I didn't understand what she was driving at. Now I do! Lecturer, reticulist, politician, maverick, leader, writer, explorer, consultant, resource person, collector – I have indeed played all these roles (and more too intimate for this blog!). Makes me wonder what tombstone I should have carved for myself in the marvellous [Sapanta cemetery in Maramures](#) where people are remembered humourously in verse and pictures for their work or way they died!!

I believe in people coming together at a local level to work for the common benefit - principles enshrined in [communitarianism](#)(about which I do have some reservations). I spent a lot of time supporting the work of [social enterprise](#)in low-income communities. None of this went down all that well with the technocrats or even members) of my political party - and the national politicians to whose books I contributed (e[g Gordon Brown](#)) soon changed their tune when they had a taste of power.
But, above all, I am a [passionate sceptic](#)– or [sceptical pluralist](#)– which is the reason for my adding the terms which form the glossary at the end - [Just Words?](#)

This flickr account gives more examples of art……also this one

The blog can be reached at www.nomadron.blogspot.com

https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2015/08/the-different-faces-of-power.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2011/12/pursuing-ones-passions.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2016/11/political-labelsagain.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2009/10/excerpt-2.html
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2012/09/strategies-for-living.html

Annex 3 LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

Just Words – best bits from [50 years of scribbling Part I](#)

The lovely format and sub-title of Hugh Johnson's beautifully-produced "[On Wine – good bits from 55 years of scribbling](#)" - picked up for a song in a remaindered Bucharest bookshop - has inspired me to start piecing together my own "collected writings".

I founded a Local Government Research Unit in 1970 which, over a decade, produced quite a few papers (now lost) and even a couple of little books. And this led in turn to quite a few invitations to write in journals with titles such as "Local Government Studies", "Social Work Today" and "Community Care" – and even to chapters in books such as "The Red Paper on Scotland" edited by ex-Prime Minister Gordon Brown (1975); "Scotland; the Real Divide" (ed G Brown and R Cook 1983); and The Scottish Government Yearbook 1984.

The focus on my writing in the first 2 decades was on two subjects – the **system of government in Scotland**; and the massive **change the Region was trying to make in its "Social Strategy** for the Eighties" (then Nineties) in the **roles and relationships of those who had and those who lacked power**. This last was quite unique – no government unit in the UK had ever attempted such a thing.

And I have, after all these years, realised one odd thing. It attracted absolutely no pushback…no resistance. Not from the Conservative party, not from the Liberals, not from the Scottish Nationalists (then a mere handful of eccentrics) - let alone from the professional bodies representing our staff. I was often the guest at training sessions, for example, of police officers. Everyone's response was an embarrassed acceptance.

Clearly this was by virtue of the way we had presented the issue – as emerging from the irrefutable evidence of a National Children's Bureau statistical evidence on poverty and its scale in the West of Scotland…and something therefore that we had to deal with at our level…at least initially. Central government and its bodies were seen as allies – not enemies – and approached in a very different manner than that which characterised our English municipal colleagues.

It is this material I must now track down…

The move to Europe in late 1990 and a new role as (EC-funded) consultant in capacity development since then has reduced my profile – although it gave me access to the EC publications network which I used with alacrity once it became obvious that they exercised absolutely no vetting on what I wrote – particularly in the project Final Reports I did between 2002 and 2012. My "[Just Words – a sceptic's glossary](#)" was developed from such work

One of my motives in writing is the disappointment I felt when I through my father's papers after his death...Here was a man who had slaved at his desk every Saturday evening as he compiled his weekly sermon for the "congregation" the following morning - and yet all I could find after his funeral were a few diaries of his camping holidays in the 1930s with his father; and the text of material he had prepared for some of the classes he ran. None of his own deep, personal thoughts.....

Of course - like most of us these narcissistic days - I go to the opposite extreme ....my only excuse is that, having enjoyed the company of many books, I feel I owe it to others to help guide

them through the deluge of material which engulfs us…..

The wonders of the Word Processor have made it easier to retain copies of the material I have written in the past 22 years – material on floppy disks borders on the old-fashioned - and text in books and journals almost irretrievable unless I strike it lucky in a second-hand bookshop or friend's library.

Three years ago I compiled notes on my work of the past 50 years in No Man's Land; journeys across disputed territories which I have now added to the list of E-books.

My scribbling from 1975-1990

HEALTH WARNING – this is a very self-indulgent post which simply records (essentially for my own use) the pieces which are still accessible from my writing during the years when we still used typewriters

Title	Argument
"What Sort of Overgovernment?" chapter in the famous "Red Paper on Scotland" (1975) edited by Gordon Brown.	My chapter looked at the then popular argument that Scotland, having just reorganised its local government system, entered the EU and facing the prospect of a new national Assembly, could become "overgoverned" – a sentiment which neoliberals were just beginning to express with their references to the "overloading" of government. I would like to think that the chapter anticipated this – although it certainly questioned certain aspect of democracy in municipal authorities….
"Community Development – its political and administrative challenge" Social Work Today Feb 1977	Western civilization blinked in 1968..its leaders panicking as the demos stirred and turning to 3 Wise Men who duly produced in 1975 the Trilateral Commission Report on The Future of Democracy (all 227 pages) which talked about the "overloading" of government and the loss of public trust… I had been in the streets in May 1968 but, no longer a student, engaging in community politics - working with community activists as they organized themselves This is a long and prescient 1977 paper – drafted as a result of a study of community development which lasted several years - which critically assesses the claims of pluralist democratic theory - and finds them wanting. Five functions of political parties are identified and tested – with the conclusion that they were losing their basic functions Three different schools of community development and their relationship to political parties are are identified and explored.
The Search for Democracy – a guide to and polemic about local government in Scotland 1977 book of which I retain a sole copy in my mountain house	A short book written around some 40 questions community activists and students were putting to me about the new system of Scottish local government which had arrived in 1975. I was in a fairly unique position to deal with this since I had, for some 3 years, been occupying one of the leading positions in the country's largest local authority – Strathclyde Region I'm **not able** at the moment to give excerpts……
"Local government, learning and social change" Linkage newsletter 3 of Institute of Operational Research	Article in a Tavistock Institute newsletter (Linkage) about the need for political learning. Reflects the work of such systems analysts as Geoffrey Vickers and Stafford Beer.

(IOR) 1978	
"A Little Local Inequality " Chapter in "Scotland- the Real Divide" ed by Gordon Brown and Robin Cook 1983	The piece started with a piece of purple prose describing the contrast between the glorious location of one of the areas in my regional seat overlooking the river Clyde and the grim realities of the lives of the people there. The article then describes how a new Social Strategy of the Regional Council was giving local people more hope
"Scottish Local Government – what future?" Chapter in The Scottish Government Yearbook 1984	A critical assessment of the system – a mere ten years after a major reorganization My more academic side on display
Various papers on Social Strategy for the 80s	The Council's strategy was unique in the UK and I made it my business to make sure that people in the country were aware of it. See also Criticism and public rationality – professional rigidity and the search for caring government; Harry Smart (1991)
Case Study in Organisational Learning and Political Amnesia	The definitive paper on the Strathclyde Region's Social Strategy experience – written a few years after I left the Region. Be warned – it's 50 pages long!!

Scribbling from Foreign Lands

I still remember the autumn morning in 1990 when I stood beside my car at the Hull docks waiting to board the ferry that would take me to a port on Denmark's west coast with a subsequent drive to WHO HQ Copenhagen. On the basis of my strategic work in the West of Scotland, the Head of European Public Health division had invited me take up a short assignment helping her develop a health promotion strategy for the newly-liberated countries of central and eastern Europe.

Ilona Kickbusch was a formidable German lady who didn't appear to need much help but I was desperate to explore new horizons – having rather boxed myself career-wise. And so it proved – with a new career in "institutional development" in central europe quickly opening up first in Prague, then Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Brussels and Latvia.

The projects were, however, largely an apprenticeship as I learned to deal not only with a new role but new subjects (transitology; a national rather than local government focus) – as well as a way of presenting ideas which took account of interpretation needs. Thus I would always try to give interpreters advance briefing – particularly for any conference papers….

But in 1999 I became the Leader of a **fairly large team in Uzbekistan on Civil Service Reform** although there was little or no pressure for any real change from the Prime Minister's Office (our beneficiary) which gave me the luxury of being able to write material for the small number of officials who did seem to be interested.

I took to doing regular – and highly interactive - sessions with middle-level officials at the Presidential Academy of Public Administration – in a training centre set up by the project.

I learned quite a lot as a result – about European systems of local government; privatisation; and that dreadful thing called "human resource management". I was particularly proud of the little series of publications I left behind eg the 60 page Transfer of Functions – European Experience 1970-2000.

All of this was to prove invaluable to me in the two projects which immediately followed.

In Azerbaijan I was Team Leader from 2003-2005 on a Civil Service project which worked with a network of personnel managers and, very much against the odds, managed eventually to have a Civil Service Agency set up to introduce new-fangled merit-based appointments. It's apparently still going strong…..

The early days were difficult – a civil service Law had been passed by Parliament but no one knew what to do with it…..A previous Team Leader had resigned in frustration. Instead of an office in the prestigious Presidential Office Building, I was offered rooms in the nearby Presidential Academy of Public Administration. There I befriended some staff with whom I started to work on lectures and 3 books……totally outside my Terms of Reference. I like to think that my method of working won friends and influenced people…. Although it did cause some problems with the European Commission monitors who watched with bemusement…

But the European Office supported me and I began to acquire friends in the President's Office and Parliament who actually encouraged me to campaign publicly – with lots of press interviews and even a television hook-up with the public!

The three books I co-authored were published with European funds and the first on public management and the civil service to be available in the Azeri language. So I was proud of that too….

I had no sooner finished that work than I was flying to Bishkek to take up a two-year project as **Team Leader in Kyrgyzstan (2005-7) which helped establish a Local Government Board**; did a lot of training of municipal people….and also left three books behind – one of which tells a good story about learning and strategic change - Developing Municipal Capacity and strongly challenged the prevailing assumptions in the capital about whose capacities needed developing! Only one of these had been in my terms of reference - Road Map for Kyrgyz Local Government (2007) which I regard as one of the best things I ever produced… The more I worked on it, the more I appreciated the potential of this device. The opening page warns that -

> A road map does not give a route – YOU choose the route. A roadmap simply locates the key features (mountains, rivers and swamps) you need to be aware of when trying to travel from the A to the B of your choice. So this is not an attempt to force foreign models on the local situation
> Another point about a road map is that it cannot cover every changing detail nor tell you how you should approach certain situations – sometimes a large bump in the road or impatience can have fatal consequences!
> So a road map is only a guide - local knowledge, judgment and skills are needed to get you to your destination! And, like a map, you don't have to read it all – only the sections which are relevant for your journey!
> So don't be discouraged by the size of the booklet – simply dip into the sections which seem most useful to you

> Such projects always have an "inception period" (generally a month) to allow the team and beneficiary to take stock of the situation and make adjustments…which even paymasters realise are needed when a President flees the country – as happened in March 2005 as I was completing my round of visits not only to "beneficiaries" but other "stakeholders" such as UNDP, The World Bank and US Aid. I took full advantage of that period (which involved my own flight – back to Baku for a week of safety) to ensure the "maximum feasible flexibility" in the project.

> One of the high points of the project for me was when, at a Conference of the municipalities, I

invited the participants to play a game similar to "Pin the Tail on the Donkey".
As you will see from the annexes of the Road Map, participants were simply invited to

- identify the key elements involved in making a successful car trip (features of the car; geography; roads; petrol stations);
- list the key players in the local government system (politicians; laws; citizens; lobbies)
- pin the appropriate label on the map

At that point, I decided that it was time to see how the newest members of the European Union were coping. **I had acquired an old mountain house in a remote village in the Carpathian mountain** which my Romanian partner took from a shell in 2000 to a warm habitable home with superb vistas from front balcony and back terrace of two spectacular mountain ranges……
I got the chance to spend only one summer there in 2007 there before being tempted by one of the last Phare-funded projects which bore the highly poetic title – "*Technical Assistance to the Institute of Public Administration and European Integration - for the development of an in-service training centre network linked to the implementation and enforcement of the Acquis*".
The project's aim was to –

" build a system for in-service training of Inspectors and other stakeholders to satisfy clearly identified training needs and priorities in the field of acquis communautaire implementation". Five fields were selected by the Institute for the initial development of training and training material – Food safety; Environment; E-government; Consumer protection; and Equal opportunities
The project appointed Bulgarian specialists in these fields to manage this process of designing and delivering training. In six months the project was able to -

- Produce 18 training courses
- Draft Guidelines for assessing training; how to carry out assessment which helps improved training.
- Produce a Training of Trainers' Manual; and a Coaching Manual
- Run 30 workshops in the 6 regions for 500 local officials
- Draft a Discussion Paper to identify the various elements needed to help improve the capacity of Bulgarian state administration. This offered examples of good practice in both training and implementation.

"Procurement issues" (for which read a combination of Bulgarian and Italian corruption) delayed the start of the project by some 4 months…….and continued to plague us for the remainder of the year. But it was, for me again, a marvellous learning opportunity during which I learned so much about both the fundamental issue of "compliance with European norms" - as well as how effective training could and should be organized……

Scribbling – the professional writings since 1990

This is a record of my professional writing over the past 30 years and included largely to ensure that I have easy access to such source material. **It does not include** the material about my travels in places such as Bulgaria, Germany and Romania and the annual collection of posts I produce which you can find listed in the top right corner of the blog…

"In Transit – notes on good governance" 1999 book	in which I tried to capture for my new colleagues in ex-communist countries what I felt we in the West had learned, between 1970 and 2000, about managing change in the public sector My initial projects in CzechoSlavaki, Romania, Hungary and Latvia were all a bit scrappy and it was the 3 Central Asia projects of 1999-2007 which gave me the real satisfaction
Transfer of Functions – European Experience 1970-2000. Uzbekistan 2002	The experience of transferring functions in Europe to different levels of government in the latter part of the 20th century
Policy analysis for Slovakian senior civil servants - a manual	One of my least successful efforts I need to add a bibliography and update it a bit eg Paul Cairney Eugene Bardach's "Practical Guide to Policy-making" (2016) is a useful model
Public Admin Review in Azerbaijan as at 2005	This was the first project since I had left Scotland whose results left me totally satisfied – what seemed a hopeless situation when I arrived in 2002 started slowly to give hope, culminating in the setting up of a Civil Service Agency
"Missionaries, Mercenaries or Witchdoctors?" Paper presented to 2006 NISPAcee Conference	A fairly biting analysis of the shortcomings of Eiropean Technical Assistance in its efforts to develop the capacity of Ministries and state bodies in ex-communist countries
Road Map for Local Government under threat 2007	I had experience of helping run a municipal authority – but not designing a local government system. Romania, CzechoSlovakia, Hungary and Latvia gave me certain insights about this in the 1990s but it was a 2year project in Kyrgyzstan which helped me produce this detailed RoadMap
Administrative Reform with Chinese Characeristics 2011	China still haunts me – 11 years later. I was invited to lead a 4 year EC project in the country but had culture shock very quickly…I produced 17 reasons for my resignation – but still learned enough to write this piece….
"The Long Game – not the Logframe" paper presented to 2011 NISPAcee Conference at Varna	critique of EC technical assistance to PAR – presented to NISPAcee Annual Conferences of 2007 and 2011
Training that Works 2011	100 page paper based on what I felt I had learned in the last decade particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria. It challenges a few myths
Blog 2009-2021 www.nomadron.blogspot.com	See the annual collection of posts for the last 2 years – as well as E-books on administrative reform, Bulgarian art, Romanian culture, Germany etc
No Man's Land; journeys across disputed territories (2018)	A first effort at my personal story
Just Words - a Sceptic's glossary	EC reports always gave an opportunity for provocative writing and I started this habit of caustic definitions early in my career with them

OTHER WRITING

[What is to be Done? Dispatches to the Next Generation](#) (2021) a mea culpa to my kids
A short book of reflections on how the western world got to its present state over the past half-century…

[Change for the Better? A Life in Reform](#); (2021) inspired by a book about the British experiencing of "dismembering the state" this little effort is based on 16 questions….and tries to guide the reader through the voluminous (and forbidding) literature about reform efforts…

[To Whom it May Concern – the 2019 posts](#) (2020) Be warned – it has almost 300 pages. But it's thematically organized with introductory summaries to each section

[Just Words - a glossary and bibliography](#) for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of power (2019 version) Only 50 pages – but a great read!

[Bulgarian Realists – getting to know Bulgaria through its Art](#) (2017 edition)
An unusual take on a country, the core of this book are 300 short notes on painters who caught my fancy in the decade I have known Bulgaria….

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey](#) (2014) My (cultural) introduction to a little-known country

[German Musings](#) (2014 – but enlarged and updated) I have always had a particular affection for this country – and this book has an exhaustive number of hyperlinks explaining why

[In Transit – notes on good governance](#) (1999) The book I wrote two decades ago for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of state bodies](#) (2009) - this paper extracts some lessons from the work I've done in the last decade - particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria. Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[The Search for the Holy Grail – the 2018 posts](#) (2019) wix

[No Man's Land – journeys across disputed borders](#) (2018) wix
A recasting of the "Crafting Effective public admin" book to focus rather on the distinctive approach adopted by each project in an effort to fit the local context….

[Common Endeavour – the 2017 posts (2018) wix](#)

[The Slaves' Chorus – the 2016 posts (2017) wix](#)

[In Praise of Doubt – a blogger's year (2016) wix](#)

[Crafting Effective Public Administration](#) (2015);
This is a collection of short reflective notes about the efforts we have seen in the past 50 years to improve the machinery of government – with an emphasis on the role of the EU and its various programmes. They draw on (a) my pretty extensive reading of that extensive section of the literature on public administration reform which focusses on British experience (since 1970); but also on that of the

various countries of central Europe and central Asia with which I have become familiar since 1991; and (b) my own experience as a political change-agent for 22 years and then consultant on administrative reform for the past 25 years

The book should be read alongside two long papers which I produced a few years ago -
- Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics (2011) which starts with an outline of the 12 features of Chinese public service which impacted on me when I lived in Beijing for a couple of months, preparing for a longer project. The rest of the paper is a summary of the sort of lessons I felt I had learned up to 1999 about public administration reform
- "The Long Game – not the logframe" was a caustic paper I presented to the 2011 NISPAcee Conference (building on an earlier paper to the 2007 Conference) in which I took apart the superficiality of the assumptions EC bureaucrats seemed to be making about the prospects of its Technical Assistance programmes making any sort of dent in what I called (variously) the kleptocracy or "impervious regimes" of most ex-communist countries.

With the exception of some 20 pages, they are, in effect, chatty notes on my everyday reading and thinking in a period – after 2009 - when I could be fairly relaxed. I had basically "hung up my boots". Although I was nominally Team Leader of an (EU Structural Fund) project in Bulgaria in 2010-12 and also involved in a bid for another (unsuccessful) project in the same country – my role was not a demanding one and gave me the time and opportunity to reflect.

The Independence Argument – home thoughts from abroad (2015) How I tried to make sense of the 2 year debate which took place in Scotland about its referendum about independence.

Learning from Experience – a Bulgarian project (2009) I learned a lot from my projects – and was lucky to be given my head. This describes how creatively I used my Terms of Reference

Building Municipal Capacity (2007) - another interesting account of an intellectual journey

Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan (2007) - this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling out this metaphor - and developing and using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate (2006) This is how I presented the Kygrz experience of local government at an international conference

Overview of PAR in transition countries (2006) This is the paper I drafted for the European Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June 2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!

A Draft Guide for the Perplexed; a short paper I wrote in 2001 to share my concerns about the direction in which Western society was going…..

Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000 I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

Annotated Bibliography for change agents - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes on the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?